

THE
Strange Friend

OF

Tito Gil

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

"Friend! Wait!" FRONTISPIECE.

Tito and Elena meet at the cathedral. . . Page 13

"Thou art forgiven." " 97

"What city is this?" " 113

THE STRANGE FRIEND

OF

TITO GIL.

CHAPTER I.

REWARDS AND SERVICES.



TITO GIL was a poor boy, tall, thin and sallow, with great black eyes, and a frank, open face ; badly dressed and awkward, but possessed of a bright happy disposition.

At the time our story opens, he was about nineteen years of age ; the son, nephew, grand-nephew, cousin and Heaven knows what more, to the best of the old Court shoemakers.

His mother, Crispina Lopez, died in giving him birth, and her husband, Juan Gil, did not regard the child with much affection until he learned that he might be left a widower, from which it may be inferred that the poor shoe-

maker and Crispina Lopez were an example of brief but bad marriages.

Nevertheless, and judging only from appearances Crispina Lopez deserved to be more sincerely mourned by her husband ; for when she left the paternal roof, she brought him as "dot," an almost exceptional beauty, abundance of clothes and house-linen and,—a very wealthy customer, nothing less than a Count, the Count of Rionuevo, who for some months had had the extraordinary caprice of covering his small delicate feet with the good Juan's rough work.

This naturally caused gossip, which however at present has nothing to do with my story; but what is important for us to know is, that at the age of fourteen, on discovering Tito to be a good cobbler, the noble Count of Rionuevo, either pitying his orphanhood, or attracted by his winning ways (no one really understood exactly why), brought him to his own palace as page after much opposition on the part of the Countess, who had heard of the child born to Crispina Lopez.

Tito had received some instruction in read-

ing, writing, arithmetic and Christian doctrine, so that he was soon able to commence the study of Latin under a friar who was a frequent visitor at the Count's home.

It may truly be said that these years were the happiest of his life, not because he lacked troubles (for the Countess took pains to remind him constantly of the shoemaker's awl and strap), but because he accompanied his protector every evening to the palace of the aged Duke of Montecarlo, whose daughter, sole heiress to all his vast possessions, was extremely beautiful, although the child of a very ugly and ungainly father.

Elena had seen but twelve summers when she first met Tito; and as the poor page passed for the son of a noble, but ruined family (pitiful lie of Count Rionuevo), the aristocratic girl did not disdain to engage in childish games with him, playfully calling him "fiancé," and perhaps sometimes allowing an embrace, when her twelve years had changed to fourteen, and his fourteen to sixteen.

So passed three years. The shoemaker's son lived in an atmosphere of luxury and

pleasure; went to Court, conversed with the nobility, acquired an elegant manner, delighted in a smattering of French (then very fashionable), and in fact learned to ride, to dance, to fence, something of chess and a little of necromancy.

Then came death for the third time, but now with less pity than before, to dash the poor boy's future to the ground. The Count of Rionuevo died intestate, and the widowed Countess, cordially hating his "protégé," hastened to tell him, with tears of feigned sorrow in her eyes, and hidden venom in her heart, that he must leave the palace without delay, as his presence only saddened her by reminding her of her husband.

Feeling as though waking from a beautiful dream, or as if the victim of a horrible nightmare, Tito, weeping bitterly, gathered together what clothes were left him, and abandoned the no longer hospitable roof. Poor, without family, and no home to shelter him, he suddenly remembered that in a certain alley of the Vistillas quarter, he owned a cobbler's stall, and some shoemaker's tools, which had

been left in charge of an old woman of the neighborhood, in whose humble home he had found a tender welcome and even sweet-meats, during the life of the virtuous Juan Gil.

He went there ; the old woman still lived ; the tools were in good condition, and during those years, the rent of the stall had brought in some seven doubloons : these the good woman gave him, not without having previously moistened them with tears of joy.

Tito decided to remain there, to devote himself to his trade, to forget completely the riding, the fencing, the dancing and the chess, but by no means Elena de Montecarlo. This last would have been impossible, although he fully appreciated that he was dead to her, or that she was to him ; but before drawing the funeral veil of hopelessness over that inextinguishable love, he wished to say a last " adieu," to her who had been for so long the very soul of his soul. One evening therefore he dressed himself carefully, and set out for the Duke's palace.

A travelling coach, drawn by four mules, was before the door. Elena, followed by her father, entered it.

"Tito!"—she exclaimed, sweetly, on seeing him.

"Drive on!"—shouted the Duke to the coachman, without hearing Elena, or seeing Rionuevo's former page.

The mules dashed off.

The unhappy boy extended his arms towards his love without having a chance to even say "good-bye."

"Good night!" growled the porter—"I must close the doors!"

"Are they going away?"—asked Tito, recovering from his bewilderment.

"Yes, sir,—to France,"—replied the porter dryly, shutting the door in his face.


The ex-page went home, more downhearted than ever, took off and carefully laid away his fine clothes, donned the worst he had, cut off his long curls, and shaved a youthful mustache that had just commenced to appear. The next day he took possession of the rickety chair which Juan Gil had occupied for forty

years, surrounded by lasts, scissors, straps and wax.

Thus we find him at the beginning of this tale, which, as I have already said, is called, "The Strange Friend of Tito Gil."

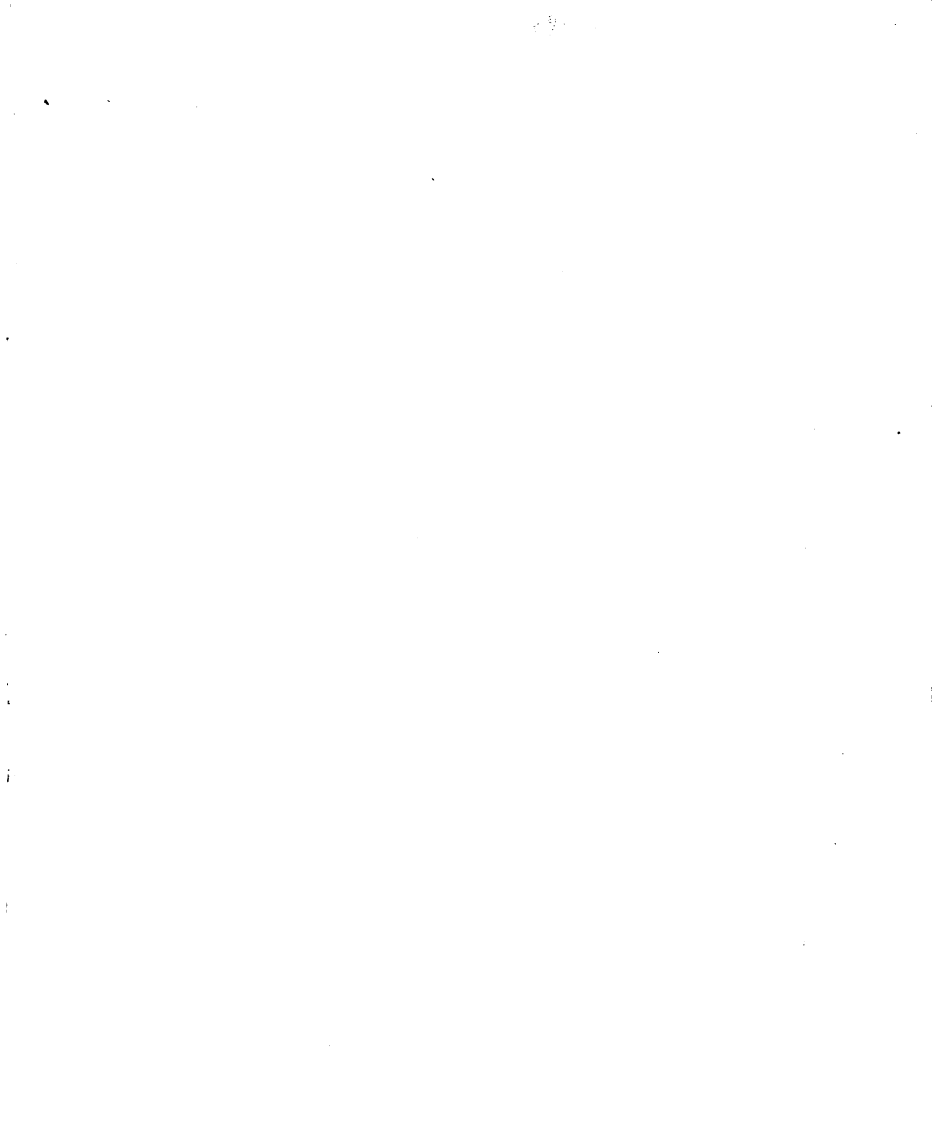
CHAPTER II.

MORE SERVICES AND REWARDS.



THE month of June, 1724, was drawing to a close. Tito had been a shoemaker two years ; but it must not be imagined that he was resigned to his fate. He was obliged to work night and day to gain a living, and regretted hourly the consequent injury to his hands. When he lacked customers, he spent his time reading, never by any chance throughout the entire week, crossing the threshold of his secluded retreat. There he lived alone, taciturn, hypochondriacal, without other diversion than that of hearing his old friend praise the beauty of Crispina Lopez, or the generosity of the Count of Rionuevo.

On Sundays, however, his life completely changed. He would then dress in his old costume of page (carefully laid away during the rest of the week), and go to the steps of





the cathedral of San Millán, close by the palace of Monteclaro, where in former days his loved Elena attended mass.

He persevered in this for two years without seeing her. Instead, he met students and pages whom he had known as a child, who now kept him posted in regard to all affairs of the higher circles which he no longer frequented. From them he learned that Elena was still in France. Of course none of them suspected that at home Tito was a cobbler. All believed him to be the beneficiary of a legacy from the Count of Rionuevo, who had manifested too much affection for him in life, for them to suppose that he had neglected to provide for his future.

So time passed, and one feast day, on the date mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, he was waiting at the door of the cathedral. He saw two elegantly dressed ladies arrive with a grand retinue of servants, who passed so close to him, that in one of them he was able to recognize his bitter enemy, the Countess of Rionuevo. He was about to conceal himself in the crowd of spectators, when

her companion raised her veil, and—oh happiness!—he recognized his beloved Elena, the sweet cause of his bitter sorrows. The poor boy approached her, uttering a frantic cry of joy.

Elena, recognizing him at once, exclaimed with the same tenderness as of old :

“Tito!”

But the Countess, grasping her arm, turned toward Tito, and said in a low voice, “I told you that I was satisfied with my present shoemaker. Leave me in peace!”

Tito, turning deathly white, fell senseless to the stone floor, as Elena and the Countess entered the church.

Two or three students who had witnessed the scene, laughed uproariously, without thoroughly understanding it.

He was carried home, there to suffer another blow; his old friend, who constituted his entire family, had died of old age during his absence. He was seized with an attack of brain fever which brought him to the very jaws of death. When he returned to consciousness, he found that a neighbor, poorer

even than himself, had taken entire charge of him during his long illness; but had been obliged to sell his furniture, his tools, his books, his home, and even his holiday attire, to pay for his medicines and physician.

At the end of two months, covered with rags, hungry, weakened by illness, penniless, and without family or friends, without even that old friend who had loved him as a mother, and, worse than all, without the hope of ever approaching his dreamed of and blessed Elena, Tito abandoned his home (already the property of another shoemaker), and took by chance the first road, without knowing where he was going, what to do, to whom to apply, how to work or how to live.

It was raining: one of those gloomy afternoons, when even the sad ringing of bells seems to give warning of the approach of death; when the sky is covered with clouds and the earth with mud; when the damp and piercing air smothers all hope in the human breast; when the poor are hungry, the orphans cold, and the unhappy envious of those already dead.

Night fell, and Tito, who still had some fever, crouched down in the corner of a dark doorway, giving way to bitter tears The idea of death then presented itself to his fevered imagination, not as a horror or fearful possibility, but pleasantly, as something welcome and longed for.

The unfortunate boy folded his arms across his breast, as if to guard that sweet image which brought him so much rest, consolation and happiness ; and in making this movement, his hand touched some hard object in the pocket of his miserable coat.

The reaction was quick ; the idea of life, and of its preservation, was now uppermost in his brain ; he grasped with all his strength that unexpected succor which came to him on the very brink of the grave.

Hope breathed in his ear a thousand seductive promises, which induced him to wonder if that hard thing he touched could be money, an enormous precious stone, or a talisman ; something, in fact, which might bring him life, fortune, happiness and fame (all of which to him meant the love of Elena de Monteclaro) ;

and putting his hand in his pocket he whispered to death :—"Wait !"

But ah ! that hard thing was nothing but a vial of vitriol with which he had mixed blacking, the last that remained to him of his shoemaker's outfit, which by some inexplicable accident had found its way to his pocket.

Consequently when he believed that he had discovered a means of salvation, the unhappy boy found in his hand a poison, and one of the most deadly.

"There is no hope !" said he, raising the vial to his lips. But a hand, cold as ice, was placed upon his shoulder, and a voice, sweet, tender and divine, murmured these words :

"Friend ! Wait !"

CHAPTER III.

HOW TITO ACQUIRED A KNOWLEDGE OF
MEDICINE IN ONE HOUR.



NO words could have astonished him more than those he had just heard.

“Friend! Wait!”

He had no friends.

But what astounded him more was the horrible feeling of cold that the hand of that shadow gave him; and even the tone of its voice chilled him like a polar wind, to the very marrow of his bones.

The night being dark, the poor orphan could not distinguish the features of the newly arrived being, though he did discern his black, flowing robes, which did not resemble those worn by either sex.

Full of doubts, mysterious fears and even a lively curiosity, Tito rose from the doorway where he had crouched, and murmured in a

faint voice, broken by the chattering of his teeth :—" What do you wish ? "

" That I ask thee ! " responded the unknown being, linking his arm in Tito's with affectionate familiarity.

" Who are you ? " asked the poor shoemaker, who felt himself dying from the cold contact of that arm.

" I am he whom thou seekest. "

" Who ? — I ? — I seek nobody, " replied Tito, endeavoring to disengage himself.

" Then why didst thou call me ? " replied the other, grasping his arm with more force.

" Ah ! Leave me ! "

" Calm thyself, Tito. I mean thee no harm, " added the mysterious being. " Come ! Thou tremblest with hunger and cold ! Yonder is an open tavern in which I have something to do to-night. Let us enter and refresh ourselves. "

" Well ! but who are you ? " asked Tito anew, his curiosity commencing to overcome his other feelings.

" I told thee when we met. We are friends — and observe that thou art the only one upon

this earth to whom I give this name. Remorse binds me to thee. I have been the cause of all thy misfortunes."

"But I do not know you," replied the shoemaker.

"Nevertheless I have entered thy house many times. Through me thou wert left motherless the day of thy birth. I was the cause of the apoplexy that killed Juan Gil; I hurled thee from the palace of Rionuevo; removed thy housekeeper, and finally put this bottle of vitriol within thy reach."

Tito shook with fear; his hair stood on end; he felt as if his contracted muscles were giving way.

"You are the Devil!" he exclaimed, with undisguised terror.

"Boy!" answered the black robed stranger in a tone of gentle reproof, "why dost thou think that? I am something more and better than the wretched being thou namest."

"Who are you then?"

"Let us enter the inn and thou wilt know."

Tito entered quickly, and placing the unknown being before the dim lamp looked at him with intense earnestness.

He appeared to be about thirty-three years of age, tall, pale, and beautiful, dressed in a long tunic, and black, flowing mantle; his long hair concealed by a peculiarly shaped black cap. He was beardless, but nevertheless not effeminate in appearance; and notwithstanding the strength and vigor of his countenance, he did not resemble a man. He appeared to be a human being without sex, a body without soul, or, more properly speaking, a soul without visible mortal body. One would call him a negative personality. His eyes were without brilliancy. They reminded one of the darkness of night; they were ghostly; eyes of sorrow, of death; but so gentle, so inoffensive, so profound in their dumbness that one could not withdraw his gaze. They attracted like the sea; fascinated like a deep abyss; consoled like forgetfulness. Scarcely had Tito fixed his eyes on those inanimate ones, when he felt as though a black veil enveloped him, that all was turning to

chaos, and that the noise of the world was like that of a cyclone.

The strange being then uttered these words:—

“I am Death, my friend—I am Death, and God has sent me—God, who has reserved for thee a glorious place in heaven. Five times I have caused thee misery, but at last, I, the implacable deity, have had compassion on thee. When He ordered me to bring thy godless soul before the Tribunal, I prayed to Him to confide thy existence to me, and allow me to remain awhile at thy side, promising in the end to deliver thy spirit cleansed of sin and worthy of His glory. Heaven has not been deaf to my prayer. Thou art then the first mortal whom I ever approached whose body did not turn to cold ashes. Thou art my only friend. Listen, now, and learn the path to happiness and eternal salvation.”

When Death had finished speaking Tito murmured an inaudible word.

“I understand thee,” replied Death, “thou speakest of Elena de Monteclaro.”

“Yes,” answered the boy.

“I swear to thee that no other arm than thine or mine shall ever enfold her. And, besides, I promise to give thee the felicity of this world and of the other. With that thou hast all. I, my friend, am not the Omnipotent,—my power is very limited, very sad. I do not create. My province is to destroy. Nevertheless it lies in my hands to give thee strength, power and greater riches than that of princes and emperors. I will make thee a physician; but *a physician! my friend*, who will know, will see, and be able to speak to me. Dost thou divine the rest?”

Tito was amazed.

“Can it be possible?” he exclaimed, as though struggling with a nightmare.

“Yes, and something more which I will tell thee, but now I need only to advise thee that thou art not the son of Juan Gil. I hear the confessions of the dying, and I know that thou art the natural child of a more noble parent.”

“Hush!” exclaimed the poor boy, hiding his face in his hands. Then, inspired by a sudden idea, he said with indescribable horror:

"With which some day you intend to kill Elena?"

"Compose thyself," answered the divinity. "Thou wilt never cause Elena's death. Therefore, answer! Dost thou, or dost thou not, wish to be my friend?"

Tito answered with another question.

"Will you give me Elena in exchange?"

"I have told thee, yes."

"Then here is my hand," said the boy, offering it to Death. But at that moment a thought more horrible than the first assailed him.

"With these hands that clasp mine you killed my poor mother!"

"'Tis true, thy mother died," answered Death. "Understand, however, that I did not cause her a single pain. I make no one suffer. He who torments thee to the last, is my rival Life; that Life that so many love."

For answer the boy threw himself into the arms of Death.

"Come, then," said the strange being.

"Where?"

“To the Granja palace, to commence thy practice as a physician.”

“But whom do we go to see there?”

• “The ex-king, Philip V.”

“What! Is Philip to die?”

“Not yet; he must return, and reign again; and thou goest to offer him the crown.”


Tito bowed his head, crushed beneath the weight of so many new ideas.

Death took his arm and led him from the inn. They had not reached the door when they heard cries and lamentations behind them.

The proprietor of the house was dead.

CHAPTER IV.

DIGRESSION, WHICH BEARS LITTLE ON THE
STORY.

FTER leaving the inn, Tito began to observe such a change in himself, and in his whole nature, that had it not been for the support of an arm as strong as that of Death, he would undoubtedly have fallen lifeless to the ground. He felt that which no other man has ever experienced—the double motion of the Earth around the Sun, and that about its own axis! But with all this he did not feel the beating of his own heart. Any one who could have examined the young shoemaker's countenance, illumined by the Moon's bright light, would have seen at a glance that its melancholy beauty, which had always made him noticeable, was enhanced to an extraordinary degree. His eyes, of a velvety blackness, now reflected that mysterious peace that

reigned in those of the personification of Death. His long silky locks, black as the raven's wing, adorned a physiognomy as pale as alabaster, at once radiant and opaque, as though within there burned a funeral light which glimmered softly through its pores. His countenance, his bearing; his manner, all had changed, causing him to assume a peculiarly statuesque and spiritual air, entirely foreign to our human nature, and rendering him superior to the coldest woman, the proudest potentates, the bravest warriors.

The two friends walked toward the mountains, sometimes following the road and sometimes leaving it; and whenever they passed through towns or villages, the slow, sad tolling of bells warned the boy that Death lost no opportunities; that his power was felt on every side; and not only did he feel it on his own heart as a mountain of ice, but he also knew that it was scattering desolation and mourning over the face of the entire earth.

Death disclosed many strange and wonderful things to him. The enemy of history, he took pleasure in uttering sarcasms regarding

his pretended usefulness; and to demonstrate it, he presented facts as they happened, and not as monuments and chronicles recount them.

The mysteries of the past were unfolded before Tito's bewildered imagination, revealing many important truths concerning the fate of empires, and humanity in general. The great mystery of the origin of life was unveiled to him, and the astounding grandeur of the end to which we mis-named mortals are approaching, causing him finally to comprehend the genius of that high philosophy the laws of which govern the evolution of cosmic matter. Its multitudinous manifestations in those ephemeral and transitory forms called minerals, plants, animals, stars, constellations, nebulae and worlds, together with physiology, geology, chemistry, botany, were all made clear to the ex-shoemaker's astonished understanding, giving him a thorough conception of the mysterious causes of life, movement, reproduction, passion, sentiment, idea, conscience, thought, memory, will, desire. God alone remained veiled, in the depths of those

{ seas of knowledge. God alone was stranger to life and death ; independent of the laws of the universe ; the one Supreme Being ; alone in substance, independent, free, and all-powerful in action !

{ Death did not attempt to envelop the Creator in his infinite shadow. He alone *was* ! His eternity, His immutability, His impenetrability, dazzled Tito, who bowed his head, adored and believed, remaining plunged in more profound ignorance than before descending into the abyss of death.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBT DISPELLED.



It was ten o'clock on the morning of the thirtieth of August, 1724, when Tito, thoroughly instructed by that negative Power, entered the palace of San Ildefonso, and asked audience of Philip V., of whose position at that time we wish to remind the reader.

First Bourbon of Spain, nephew of Louis XIV., of France, he accepted the Spanish crown only when he had found it impossible to secure that of France. But princes were dying, uncles and cousins of his, who separated him from the throne of his native land; therefore, in order to place himself in readiness to occupy it, should his nephew, Louis XV., die (at that time very ill and but fourteen years of age), he abdicated, in favor of his son Louis I., and retired to San Ildefonso. At this

stage the health of Louis XV. greatly improved, and Louis I. was suddenly taken so ill, that grave fears were entertained for his life. Couriers were kept in constant service between the Granja palace and Madrid, bringing Philip hourly bulletins concerning the condition of his son. The ambitious father, incited further by his celebrated second wife, Isabel Farnesio (much more ambitious than he), did not know what part to take in this hopeless and serious conflict. Would the throne of Spain be vacant before that of France? Should he declare his intention of reigning anew in Madrid, preparing himself to seize the heritage of his son? But should Louis I. not die? Would it not be a blunder to expose the depth of his perfidy to all Europe? Would not such action render useless his seven months of solitude? And would it not be to renounce forever the sweet hope of seating himself on the coveted throne of Saint Louis? What should he do? To hope, was only wasting precious time! He was hated by the Assembly, and denied all influence in affairs of State. To take but one step,

might compromise his life's ambition, and his name to posterity.

False Philip V! The temptations of the world assailed him in the desert, and he paid very dearly in those hours of doubt for the hypocrisy of his abdication!

Such was the condition of affairs when Tito presented himself before the scheming Philip as a courier bearing important tidings.

"What do you wish?" asked the king, without turning, when he heard him enter the chamber.

"Look at me, your majesty," answered Tito, unabashed. "Do not fear that I may read your thoughts; they are no mystery to me."

Philip turned quickly towards that man, whose voice, dry and cold as the truth it revealed, had frozen his heart's blood; but his anger melted before the funereal smile of the Friend of Death.

He felt a superstitious terror on fixing his eyes on Tito's; and raising a tremulous hand to the bell beside him, repeated his first question.

"What do you wish?"

"Sire, I am a physician," answered Tito, quietly, "and I have such confidence in my science, that I dare tell your majesty the day, hour and instant when Louis I. will die."

Philip looked with more attention at the ragged boy, whose countenance was as supernatural as beautiful.

"Speak!" said the king.

"Ah, no!" replied Tito, with a degree of sarcasm; "we must first arrange the price."

The king started on hearing these words as if waking from a dream; he saw the matter in another light, and was almost ashamed of having tolerated it.

"Here!" said he, touching the bell, "arrest this man!"

A captain of guards appeared, and placed his hand on Tito's shoulder. The boy remained perfectly quiet.

The king, returning to his first superstition, cast a side glance at the strange physician, then rising with difficulty (for the weakness he had suffered for some years had lately augmented), said to the officer: "Leave us alone."

Planting himself finally in front of Tito, as if to banish his fear, he asked him with feigned calmness,

"Well, owl-face! who the devil are you?"

"I am the Friend of Death," answered Tito, with a steady, quiet look.

"Who is the friend of all sinners," gayly added the king, as if to ward off his puerile fear. "And what have you to say of our son?"

"I say," said Tito, taking a step toward the king, who involuntarily retreated, "that I bring you a crown; I do not say whether it is that of Spain or of France, as that is the secret for which you must pay me. I also say that we are losing precious time, and that consequently I must speak to you soon and clearly. Listen to me, therefore, with attention. Louis I. is dying. Nevertheless his sickness is not incurable. Your Majesty is the dog in the manger."

Philip interrupted him.

"Speak! Say what you wish; I desire to hear it all. In any case I propose to have you hanged."

The Friend of Death, shrugging his shoulders, continued :

“I likened your Majesty to the dog in the manger. You had the crown of Spain upon your head: you dropped it, to seize that of France, and it fell upon the cradle of your son ; Louis XV. secured his own and now you are left with neither.”

“It is true!” exclaimed Philip, as much in looks as in words.

“To-day,” continued Tito, observing the king’s expression, “to-day that you are nearer to the throne of France than that of Spain, you are about to expose yourself to the same disappointment. The two infant kings, Louis I. and Louis XV., are ill ; you might be able to succeed both ; but it is necessary for you to know a few hours in advance which of the two will die first. Louis I. is in the greater danger, but the crown of France is the more beautiful. Here lies your difficulty. You appreciate the situation. You dare not stretch your hand toward the sceptre of Ferdinand, apprehensive that your son may live, that your French partisans might abandon you, and that history

would ridicule you. In fact you dare not drop the bit that you hold between your teeth, fearful that the other may be a mere shadow or illusion."

"Speak! speak!" said Philip, eagerly, fearing that Tito had concluded. "Say what you have to say, for from here you go direct to a dungeon, where only the walls will hear you. Speak! I should like to hear what the world has to say regarding my thoughts."

The ex-shoemaker smiled derisively.

"Dungeon! Gallows!" he exclaimed. "I know all that kings can do, still I am not alarmed. Listen a little longer; I am about to conclude. Sire, I must be appointed Physician to the Court, obtain the title of Duke, with thirty thousand dollars, this very day. Your Majesty laughs; but I need all this as much as your Majesty needs to know whether Louis I. will succumb to his illness."

"And you know that?" asked the king in a low voice, unable to overcome the terror which the boy caused him.

"I shall know it to-night."

"How?"

"I have already told you that I am the Friend of Death."

"And what is that? Tell me!"

"Of that I was also ignorant ; but take me to the palace in Madrid, let me see the reigning king, and I will tell you the sentence which the Eternal One has written upon his brow."

"And if you mistake?" said Philip of Anjou, drawing nearer to Tito.

"You may hang me, or hold me prisoner at your will."

"You are a wizard then !" exclaimed Philip, attempting in a measure to justify the faith he placed in Tito's words.

"Sire," he answered, "there are no wizards nowadays. The last one was Louis XIV., and the last bewitched was Charles II. The crown of Spain that we sent to you in Paris, twenty-five years ago, wrapped in the will of an idiot, redeemed us from the captivity of the Devil, in which we had lived since the abdication of Charles V. You know that better than any one."

"Physician to the Court! Duke! And thirty thousand dollars," murmured the king.

"For a crown worth more than you imagine," added Tito.

"You have my royal word," replied Philip, solemnly, overpowered by that voice, that face, that mysterious bearing.

"You swear it, your Majesty?"

"I promise it," responded the king. "I promise it, if you prove to me beforehand that you are something more than man."

"Elena, you will be mine," murmured Tito.

The king, calling the captain, gave him some orders.

"Now," said he, "while they arrange your trip to Madrid, tell me your history and explain your science."

"I desire to please you, Sire, but I fear that you would understand neither the one nor the other."

An hour later the Captain was travelling post haste to Madrid with our hero, who for the time being had discarded his rags, and was dressed in a magnificent costume of black velvet and lace, a plumed hat, and a sword at his side.

Philip had supplied him with money and

these clothes, after concluding his strange contract with Death.

We will follow the good Tito, notwithstanding his haste, for he may meet his idolized Elena or the odious Countess of Rionuevo in the queen's chamber, and we do not wish to be ignorant of the slightest details of such interesting encounters.

CHAPTER VI.

PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE.



It was about seven in the evening, when Tito and the Captain dismounted at the doors of the palace.

The news of the king's danger had spread, and an immense crowd filled the court-yard.

As our young friend entered, he found himself face to face with Death, who was hastily leaving.

"Already?" asked Tito, anxiously.

"Not yet," answered the sinister deity.

The physician breathed more easily.

"When, then?" he asked, after a pause.

"I cannot tell thee."

"Oh! speak! If you but knew what Philip has promised me!"

"I can imagine."

"But I must know if Louis I. is to die."

"Thou wilt know it at the proper time.

Pass on. The Captain has already entered the king's chamber. He brings instructions from the royal parent. At this moment thou art announced as the first physician of the world. The people crowd the stairway to see thee arrive. Thou art about to meet Elena and the Countess of Rionuevo."

"Oh! what happiness!" exclaimed Tito.

"Quarter past seven!" continued Death, consulting his pulse, which was his only and infallible timepiece. "They await thee. I must go."

"But tell me—"

"True, I had forgotten! Listen:—If I am in the chamber when thou seest the king, thou wilt know that his illness has no cure."

"And will you be there? Did you not say you were going away?"

"I do not know yet. I am ubiquitous, and should I receive *Superior* orders, there thou wilt see me, as in any other place where He may require my presence."

"What have you been doing here?"

"I have killed a horse."

Tito recoiled with horror.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you deal also with irrational beings?"

"What meanest thou by irrational? Has only man true reason? Reason stands alone; one does not see it from the earth."

"But tell me," said Tito, "animals, brutes, those which we call irrational, have they souls?"

"Yes and no. They have a spirit without free-will, and are irresponsible. But, to the devil with thee! What a questioner thou art to-day! Farewell—I go to a noble house to do thee another favor."

"A favor! Me? Tell it me! What is its nature?"

"To prevent a certain wedding."

"Ah!" exclaimed Tito, overwhelmed by a horrible suspicion, "is it possible . . .?"

"I can tell thee nothing more," answered Death. "Enter, it grows late."

"You distract me."

"Quiet thyself; all will be well. I have promised thee supreme happiness."

"Then we are friends? You do not intend to kill me or Elena?"

"Do not worry," replied Death, with a sadness and solemnity, a tenderness and gayety, with so many and different tones of voice, that Tito gave up at once the hope of understanding him.

"Wait!" he said, finally, seeing that the shrouded being was moving away. "Repeat the hours, once more, to me, that I may make no mistake. If you are in the sick chamber, and do not look at the patient, it signifies that he will die of the disease."

"Certainly; but should I face him, he dies during the day. If I lie in the same bed, he has three hours of life. If thou seest him in my arms, only one hour remains; but when thou seest me kiss his brow, say a prayer for his soul."

"And you will not speak one word to me?"

"Not one. I lack permission to reveal in that manner the intentions of the Eternal One. Thy advantage over other men, consists only in thy ability to see me. Good night! Forget me not!" So saying, he disappeared in space.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROYAL CHAMBER.



ITO entered the regal abode, neither regretting nor content with having established relations with Death. But as he ascended the stairs of the palace, and remembered that he was to see his idolized Elena, all lugubrious ideas disappeared, like night birds at the break of day.

With a brilliant escort of courtiers, and other personages of rank, he passed through galleries and salons toward the royal bed-chamber, whilst all admired the wonderful beauty and tender youth of the famous physician, whom Philip had sent from the Granja palace, as the last hope of human aid, to save the life of his son.

The two Courts were there, that of Louis and that of Philip. There were, so to speak, two rival powers, who for a week had lived in

constant warfare: there were the old servants of the first Bourbon branch, and the new ones whom the Regent of France (Philip of Orleans, the Generous), had grouped around the throne of Spain to prevent the ambitious ex-Duke of Anjou from seizing that of his grandfather; there were, in fact, the courtiers of the gentle, dying child, and those of his beautiful wife, the powerful daughter of the Regent, the renowned Duchess of Montpensier. The allies of Isabella Farnesio, stepmother of Louis I., desired his death, in order that the sons of the second marriage of Philip V. might be nearer the throne of St. Ferdinand.

The partisans of the young queen wished the sick monarch to live, not from any love of the quarrelsome pair, but from hate of Philip V. whom they did not wish to see again upon the throne.

The friends of the unfortunate Louis trembled at the idea of his death; for, having induced him to shake off the restraint which the hermit of the Granja exercised over him, they well knew that if the latter returned to power, his first act would be to exile or imprison them.

The palace therefore was a labyrinth of opposed interests, various ambitions, intrigues, suspicions, hopes and fears.

Tito entered the chamber, searching in all directions for one face—that of his beloved Elena. Close to the king's bed he saw her father, the Duke of Montecarlo, the close friend of the late Count of Rionuevo. He was speaking with the Archbishops of Santiago and Toledo, the Marquis de Mirabal, and Don Miguel de Guerra, the four most deadly enemies of Philip V. The Duke did not recognize the former page and youthful companion of his charming daughter. Across the room, and not without a certain feeling of fear, the Friend of Death recognized among the ladies who surrounded the young and beautiful Louisa Isabel of Orleans, the Countess of Rionuevo, his implacable and bitter enemy. Although he almost touched her, as he passed to kiss the queen's hand, she did not recognize her husband's son. Against a piece of tapestry, behind this group of ladies, he saw, among two or three others whom he did not know, a tall, pale, beautiful woman.

It was Elena de Monteclaro !

Tito gazed at her intently, while the young girl trembled at the sight of that beautiful and funereal face, as though looking upon the countenance of a dead lover ; as if she saw, not Tito, but his ghost enveloped in a shroud ; as if, in fact, she saw a being of the other world.

Tito in the Court, consoling the queen ! that proud and haughty princess who treated all with disdain ! Tito in that elegant dress, admired and respected by all the nobility ! Ah ! it must be a dream ! . . . thought the charming Elena.

“Come, Doctor !” said the Marquis of Mirabal. “His Majesty has awakened.”

Tito made a painful effort to shake off the ecstasy which seized his whole being, on finding himself before his loved one, and approached that bed of disease.

The second Bourbon of Spain was a rickety youth of seventeen years, tall and thin, like a plant that grows in the shade.

His countenance (which did not lack a certain fineness of expression despite its irregu-

larity of feature), was now frightfully swollen, and covered with ash-colored pustules. He appeared a coarse, clay imitation of a sculptured marble.

He directed an anxious look at the other youth who was approaching his bed, and encountering his dull and lustreless eyes, fathomless as the mystery of eternity, gave a shrill cry and hid his face beneath the sheets. Tito in the mean time looked about to discover Death. But Death was not there!

"Will he live?" asked several courtiers in a low voice, who believed they read hope in Tito's expression.

He was about to say, "Yes," (forgetting that his opinion was to be given only to Philip V.), when he felt someone touch his arm.

Turning, he saw standing near him at the head of the bed, a person dressed entirely in black.

It was Death.

"He will die of this illness, but not to-day," thought Tito.

"How does he appear to you?" asked the Archbishop of Toledo, feeling as all did that

involuntary respect inspired by the youth's supernatural appearance.

"Pardon me," replied the ex-shoemaker, "my opinion is reserved for him who sent me."

"But," added the Marquis of Mirabal, "you who are so young, cannot have acquired so much scientific skill; undoubtedly God or the Devil has inspired you. You may be a saint who works miracles, or a magician, a friend of witches."

"As you please," responded Tito; "at any rate, I read the future of the king who lies in this bed; a secret of value to you, as it would enable you to solve the doubt whether tomorrow you will be the favorite of Louis I., or the prisoner of Philip V."

"What!" stammered Mirabal, pale with anger, but smiling blandly.

At this moment Tito observed that Death, not content with having approached the monarch, took advantage of his visit to the royal chamber to seat himself beside a lady, almost in the same chair, and was regarding her fixedly.

The doomed victim was the Countess of Rionuevo.

"Three hours!" thought Tito.

"I must speak to you," continued Mirabal, to whom had occurred the idea of purchasing the young physician's secret.

But a glance and smile from Tito, who had divined his thoughts, so disconcerted him that he drew back.

The look and smile were the same which that morning had conquered Philip V.

During Mirabal's confusion, Tito made a great step in his career, and established his reputation at Court.

"Sir," said he to the Archbishop of Toledo, "the Countess of Rionuevo, whom you see seated alone in that corner" (we already know that Death was visible only to Tito), "will die in the course of three hours. Advise her to prepare for her last moments."

The Archbishop recoiled with horror.

"What is it?" asked Don Miguel de Guerra.

The prelate related Tito's prophecy to various persons, and all eyes were at once fixed

upon the Countess, who actually began to grow deathly pale.

Meanwhile Tito approached Elena, who was standing in the middle of the room, silent and immovable as a statue ; charmed, overcome, possessed of a terror and of a happiness that she could not herself define, she followed every movement of the friend of her childhood.

"Elena!" murmured the youth, as he reached her side.

"Tito!" she answered, mechanically, "is it indeed you?"

"Yes," replied Tito, fondly, "'tis I ; fear nothing." And he left the apartment.

The Captain was awaiting him in the antechamber.

Tito wrote some words on paper, and said to Philip's faithful retainer: "Take this to the Granja. Do not lose a moment."

"And you," replied the Captain, "I cannot leave you. You are a prisoner in my custody."

"I place myself on parole," proudly replied Tito, "for I cannot follow you."

"But—the king!"

"The king will approve your conduct."

"Impossible!"

"Listen! and you will see that I am right."

At this moment they heard a great commotion in the royal chamber.

"The physician! the physician!" cried several persons, running from the room.

"What has happened?" asked Tito.

"The Countess of Rionuevo is dying," said Don Miguel de Guerra. "Come this way, they have placed her in the queen's bed-chamber."

"Go, Captain!" said Tito, "I insist."

And he accompanied these words with such a glance and gesture that the soldier departed without a word. Tito followed De Guerra into the queen's chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.

REVELATIONS.



LISTEN!" said a voice to Tito, as he was walking toward the bed on which the Countess lay.

"Ah! 'tis you," exclaimed the youth, recognizing Death.

"Has she already expired?"

"Who?"

"The Countess."

"No."

"Then, why do you leave her?"

"I do not leave her, my friend; I have already told thee I am everywhere, at all times, and under many different forms."

"Well! what do you wish of me?" asked Tito, with a certain aversion on hearing these words.

"I am here to do thee another favor."

"Well! speak."

"Dost thou know that thou art lacking in

respect to me?" said Death, with forced gravity.

"It is natural," answered Tito. "Our intimacy, the complicity—"

"What meanest thou by complicity?"

"Nothing. I simply allude to a painting I saw when a child. It represented Medicine. Two persons were lying in one bed, or, to speak more clearly, a man and his illness. The physician entered the room blindfolded, and armed with a club. Upon nearing the bed he commenced beating the patient and his illness unmercifully. I do not remember which was the first victim of the punishment, but I believe it was the invalid."

"Pleasing allegory! But we must to business!"

"Yes, let us go. All seem astonished to see me standing here, apparently alone, in the middle of the room."

"They will imagine that thou art meditating, or awaiting inspiration. Listen to me a moment. Thou knowest that the past is mine by right, and that I can narrate it to thee. Not so the future."

"Proceed."

"A little patience, please. Thou art about to speak, for the last time, with the Countess of Rionuevo, and it is my duty to recount a certain history to thee."

"It is useless; I forgive that woman."

"It concerns Elena," quietly observed Death.

"How?"

"It refers to your nobility, and marriage to her."

"Noble! I—? It is true, the king has made me a duke."

"Monteclaro would not be content with an adventurer. Thou hast need of ancestors."

"What do you mean?"

"I come to tell thee that thou art the last branch of the Rionuevos."

"Yes, but adulterous."

"You are mistaken: natural, and very natural."

"That may be, but who is to prove it?"

"Precisely what I am about to tell thee."

"Speak!"

"Listen, and do not interrupt me. The

Countess is the stumbling-block in thy existence."

"I know it."

"She holds thy happiness in her hands."

"I know that, also."

"Well, the time has come to wrest it from her."

"How? In what manner?"

"Thou wilt see. As thy father loved thee so dearly—"

"Ah! he loved me much!" exclaimed Tito.

"I have told thee not to interrupt. As thy father loved thee so dearly, he did not leave this world without thinking very seriously of thy future."

"What! did the Count not die intestate?"

"Where did'st thou get that idea?"

"It is so understood by everybody."

"Pure invention of the Countess, to secure the Count's money, and make a favorite nephew her heir."

"Oh!"

"Calm thyself; all can be arranged. Thy father had in his possession, a declaration of Crispina Lopez and Juan Gil, a duly certified

authority, which stated clearly that thou wert the natural son of the Count of Rionuevo and Crispina Lopez. This same circumstance thy father confessed at the hour of his death, before a priest and a notary, whom I saw there and whom I know perfectly well. Certainly the priest . . . but hold! this I cannot tell thee. The fact is, the Count named thee his sole and only heir; which was all the easier, as he had not a single relative, near or remote. Nor did that good father's solicitude rest here. He commenced the foundation of thy future happiness on the very brink of the grave."

"Oh! my father!" murmured Tito.

"Listen. Thou knowest the great friendship which united the honored Count and the Duke of Montecarlo for so many years. They were companions in arms during the War of Succession."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, then," continued Death, "thy father, divining the love thou felt'st for the charming Elena, addressed a long and tender letter to the Duke, a few moments before he expired, in which he told him all, asking the hand of

his daughter for thee, and reminding him of the many and signal proofs of friendship that had passed between them."

"And that letter?" asked Tito, vehemently.

"That letter alone would have convinced the Duke, and thou would'st have been his son many years ago."

"What has become of it?" again asked Tito, tremulous with love and anger.

"That letter might have prevented thee from entering into relations with me," continued Death.

"Oh! do not be cruel. Tell me that it exists!"

"That is the truth."

"What! that it exists?"

"Yes."

"Who has it?"

"The same person who intercepted it."

"The Countess?"

"The Countess."

"Oh!" exclaimed the youth, taking a step toward the death-bed.

"Wait," said Death, "I have not finished yet."

"The Countess has preserved her husband's will, which she almost snatched from my hands."

"From yours?"

"I say from mine, because the Count was already half dead. With regard to the priest and the notary, I will tell thee where they live and I believe they will declare the truth."

Tito thought a moment; then, looking fixedly at the funereal personage, exclaimed:—

"That is to say, that if I succeed in getting possession of these documents . . . "

"To-morrow thou wilt marry Elena."

"Oh, God!" murmured the boy, taking another step toward the bed.

Then he turned again towards Death.

The courtiers did not comprehend what was passing in Tito's heart. They all believed him to be alone, or communing with the miraculous being to whom he owed his science; but such was the terror with which he had already inspired them, that no one dared to interrupt him.

"Tell me," added the ex-shoemaker, ad-

dressing his fearful companion, "why it is that the Countess has not burned those papers?"

"Because the Countess like all criminals is superstitious; because she fears some day she may repent; because she conjectures that those papers will be, so to speak, her passport to eternity; for it is a well-known fact that no sinner blots out the tracks of his crimes, fearful of forgetting them at the hour of death, and of not being able to retrace his steps to find the path of virtue. I tell thee then, that those papers exist."

"So, then, by obtaining them, Elena will be mine," insisted Tito, still doubting Death's ability to procure that happiness for him.

"There would yet be another obstacle to overcome," responded Death.

"What?"

"Elena has been promised by her father to the nephew of the Countess, the Viscount de Daimiel."

"What! she loves him?"

"No; but they were betrothed two months ago."

"Oh! then all is hopeless!" exclaimed Tito, in despair.

"It would have been without me," replied Death, "but I told thee, at the doors of this palace, that I was about to prevent a wedding."

"How! have you killed the Count?"

"I!" exclaimed Death, with sarcasm, "God forbid! I have not killed him,—he died."

"Ah!"

"Hush! No one knows it yet. At this moment his family believe that the poor youth is simply napping. Therefore . . . be careful how you act! Elena, the Countess and the Duke are but two steps from thee. Now or never!" So saying, Death approached the sick woman's couch.

Tito followed in his footsteps. Many of the people who were there in the room, among them the Duke of Montecarlo, knew of Tito's prediction, that the Countess would die within three hours. They saw it almost fulfilled; the happy, beautiful woman of a few hours before, had suddenly become an almost inanimate body, shaken at intervals by violent convul-

sions. Thus it was that all commenced to regard our hero with superstitious awe and fanatical reverence. The Countess, for her part, not well distinguishing Tito, stretched toward him a tremulous and supplicating hand, while indicating with the other that they should be left alone.

All retired, and Tito seated himself beside the dying woman.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SOUL.



ALTHOUGH the Countess of Rio-nuevo, Tito's terrible enemy, plays so odious a part in our story, she was not an old and ugly woman, as many will perhaps have imagined. Physical nature is also sometimes deceptive.

This illustrious woman was, at this time, but thirty-five years of age, and in the fulness of a magnificent beauty—tall, active and well formed; her eyes, blue and treacherous as the sea, concealed great depths under a languid and suave manner. The frankness of her mouth, the soft tint of her skin, and the queenly grace of her bearing, proved that neither sorrow nor passion had preceptibly diminished her incomparable beauty. Thus it was that on seeing her now, stricken and suffering, overcome by terror, and racked with

pain, the least compassionate would have experienced a peculiar pity, closely akin to horror or fear. Though Tito thoroughly hated the woman, he could not avoid this inexplicable feeling of sympathy and dread, and, mechanically taking the beautiful hand which she tendered him he whispered with more sorrow than resentment,

“Do you know me, Countess?”

“Save me!” replied the dying woman, not heeding his question.

At this moment another person emerged noiselessly from behind the curtains, and joined the two speakers, half reclining on the pillow and supporting his head on his hand.

It was Death!

“Save me!” repeated the Countess, who felt intuitively that our hero hated her; “they say you are a magician, that you commune with Death. Save me!”

“You fear death greatly, Countess!” responded the youth with indifference, at the same time releasing her hand.

That stupid cowardice, that animal terror, which left no room for any other thought or

sensation, disgusted Tito profoundly, for it showed him the wretchedly selfish spirit of the author of all his troubles.

"Countess!" he then exclaimed, "think of your past and of your future! Think of God and of your neighbor! Try to save the soul, since the body is no longer yours."

"Ah! I am going to die," exclaimed the Countess.

"No, you are not."

"Not to die!" shrieked the poor woman, with savage joy.

The youth continued with severity :

"No! because you have never lived. On the contrary, you are to enter the soul-life, which for you will be endless suffering, as for the just it is eternal happiness."

"Ah! then I am to die," murmured the patient anew, shedding tears for the first time in her life.

"Countess, you will not die," again replied the physician, with indescribable majesty.

"Have pity on me," said the poor woman, regaining hope.

"You will not die," continued the youth, "because you weep. The soul never dies, and repentance can open to us the doors of eternal life."

"My God! my God!" cried the Countess, distracted by that cruel uncertainty.

"You do well to appeal to Him. Save the soul! I repeat, save the soul! Your beautiful body (that earthly idol), and your sacrilegious existence have ended forever. This temporal life, these earthly joys, that prosperity and beauty, that luxury and fortune which you have striven so hard to preserve, the riches you have usurped, the air, the sun, the world you have known till now, all are lost to you, they have even now disappeared. To-morrow nothing will remain but dust and darkness, vanity and corruption, solitude and oblivion; the soul alone survives, Countess. Think of your soul."

"Who are you?" softly asked the dying woman, gazing at him in astonishment. "I have known you before now. You hate me, it is you who kill me. Ah!"

At this instant Death placed his white hand

upon her head, and said :—" Finish, Tito, the last hour approaches."

" I do not wish her to die," replied Tito, " even yet she may amend ; even yet remedy all the evil she has done. Save her body, and I will answer for her soul."

" Conclude, Tito ! conclude ; the last hour is about to strike."

" Poor woman ! " murmured the youth, looking at her with compassion.

" You pity me," said the dying woman with ineffable tenderness. " I who never acknowledged you, never loved you. Never have I felt as now for you. Pity me. Tell me. My heart softens at the sound of your sad voice."

And it was true.

The Countess exalted by the terror of that supreme moment, suffering remorse, fearing punishment, and deprived of all that constituted her pride and pleasure upon earth, commenced to feel the first breathings of a soul, which until now had remained lost and silent in the depths of her iniquity ; a soul always insulted, but full of patience and heroism ; a

soul, in fact, to be compared to the sad daughter of criminal parents, who, quiet and silent, shrinks from sight and weeps alone, until one day, when at the first sign of repentance that she observes, recovers her spirit, rushes to their arms and lets them hear her pure, sweet voice—song of the lark, music of heaven, which appears to welcome the dawn of virtue after the darkness of sin.

“You ask me who I am?” responded Tito, comprehending all this. “I scarcely know myself. I was your mortal enemy, but now I do not hate you. You have heard the voice of truth, the voice of death, and you have responded, God be praised! I came to this bed of sorrow to ask from you the happiness of my life; but now I can leave, content without it, for I believe I have brought about your redemption, that I have saved your soul. Heavenly Jesus! in that I have pardoned my injuries and done good to my enemy, I am satisfied; I am happy; I ask no more.”

“Who are you, mysterious and sublime boy? Who are you? so good and so beautiful, who come like an angel to my death-bed,

to make my last moments so sweet ? ” asked the Countess, eagerly, taking Tito’s hand.

“ I am the Friend of Death,” replied the youth ; “ do not be surprised then that I quiet your heart. I speak to you in his name, therefore you have believed me. I am delegated to come to you by that compassionate divinity who is the peace of the earth, the truth of the worlds, the redeemer of the spirit, the messenger of God ; who is all but forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is in life, Countess, not in death. Remember, and you will know me.”

“ Tito ! ” exclaimed the Countess, losing consciousness.

“ She is dead ? ” the physician asked Death.

“ No, there still remains a half an hour.”

“ But will she speak again ? ”

“ Tito,” sighed the dying woman.

“ Finish,” added Death.

The youth bent over the Countess, o’er whose beautiful countenance there shone a new and divine beauty ; and from those eyes where the fire of life melted in languishing and melancholy glances, from that gasping and half-opened mouth, flushed with fever, from

those soft warm hands, and that white throat turned toward him in infinite anguish, he met such an eloquent expression of repentance and tenderness, such loving caresses and earnest entreaties, so infinite and solemn a promise, that without hesitating an instant he left the bed, called the Duke of Montecarlo, the Archbishop and three of the other nobles who were in the apartment, and said to them: "Listen to the public confession of a soul which returns to God." Those persons approached the dying woman, induced more by his inspired face than by his words.

"Duke," murmured the Countess, on seeing Montecarlo, "my confessor has a key—Sire," she continued, turning toward the Archbishop, "ask him for it—. This boy, this physician, this angel, is natural and acknowledged son of the Count of Rionuevo, my late husband, who when dying, wrote you a letter, Duke, asking Elena's hand for him. With this key—in my bedroom—all the papers—I pray you—I command you."

At these words she fell back upon the pillow, the light gone from her eyes, the

breath from her lips, the color from her face.

"She is dying!" exclaimed Tito. "Remain with her, Sire," he added, addressing the Archbishop. "And you, Duke, listen to me."

"Wait," said Death, as he heard the youth.

"What more?" he replied.

"Thou hast not forgiven her."

"Tito!—your forgiveness!"—murmured the dying woman.

"Tito!" exclaimed the Duke of Montecarlo, "is it you?"

"Countess, may God pardon you as I do. Die in peace," said the son of Crispina Lopez, with religious fervor.

At this moment Death bent over the Countess, and pressed his lips to her brow.

That kiss resounded in the throat of a corpse.

One cold, tremulous tear coursed down the dead woman's cheek.

Tito wiped away his own, and turned to answer Montecarlo. "Yes, Duke, it is I."

As the Archbishop read the funeral prayers, Death disappeared. It was midnight.

CHAPTER X.

UNTIL TO-MORROW.



SEARCH for those papers, Duke," said Tito to Monteclaro, "and do me the kindness to speak to Elena."

"Come! Doctor, come! The king is dying!" exclaimed Don Miguel de Guerra, interrupting him.

"Follow me, Duke," said the youth, with great respect, "it has struck twelve, and I can give you some very important news, I do not know whether good or bad. It is this; I can tell you whether or not Louis I. will die to-day."

The morning of the thirty-first of August had dawned, when Louis I. was to deliver up his spirit to his Creator.

Tito discovered the certainty of it by seeing Death standing in the middle of the room with his eyes fixed on the sick king.

"To-day the king dies," whispered Tito, in

Monteclaro's ear. "This news is the wedding present which I make to Elena. If you know its value, guard it in secret, and let it govern your conduct toward Philip V."

"But Elena is promised to another," replied the Duke.

"The nephew of the Countess of Rionuevo died this afternoon," interrupted Tito.

"Oh! what has befallen us!" exclaimed the Duke. "Who are you—you whom I knew as a child, and who now terrify me with such power and science?"

"The queen calls," said a lady at this moment to the Duke of Monteclaro, who seemed stupefied.

The lady was Elena.

The Duke approached the queen, leaving the two lovers alone in the middle of the room. Not alone, for Death was but three steps off.

The two stood mutely gazing at each other as if bewildered, and fearful that their mutual presence might be a dream which would pass away should they move a hand or utter the lightest breath.

On meeting, a few hours before in that same place, both had experienced, mingled with an ineffable happiness, a certain secret anguish, like that which two friends feel, after a long separation, on recognizing each other in a prison, on the morning of execution, unconscious accomplices of a fatal crime, and victims of the same persecution. One might also say that the sad joy with which Tito and Elena recognized each other, was equal to the bitter pleasure which the corpse of a jealous husband would experience (if corpses feel) in the tomb, on hearing the door of the cemetery open at night, knowing that it is his wife whom they are bringing to inter. "So you are here!" the poor corpse would say; "it is now four years that I have been alone, thinking of what you were doing in the world, you, so beautiful, so unloving, that you discarded your mourning the very year of my death. You have waited long; but you are here, and if love is no longer possible between us, neither is infidelity or forgetfulness. We belong to each other negatively. Although nothing unites us, we are united, because nothing can separate

us. For the jealousies, uncertainties, anxieties of life, you have substituted an eternity of love and remembrance. I pardon you all."

These impressions, softened in the gentle characters of Tito and Elena, by her innocence, by his lofty intelligence, and by the exalted virtue of both, shone like funeral torches in the souls of the two lovers, by whose light they saw an illimitable future of peaceful love, which nothing could disturb or destroy, unless all that then passed was but a fugitive dream.

They gazed at each other for a long time with fervent idolatry. Elena's blue eyes lost themselves in the dark orbs of Tito, as the high heaven her brightness in the utter darkness of our nights; whilst his melted in the fathomless transparency of the pure celestial blue of hers, lost, as are sight, idea, and even sentiment, when attempting to measure infinite space.

So, perhaps they would have remained for eternity, had not Death attracted Tito's attention.

"What do you wish?" asked the youth.

"That thou lookest upon her no longer."

"Ah! you love her!" exclaimed Tito, with indescribable anguish.

"Yes," answered Death, gently.

"You think of robbing me of her?"

"No! I think of uniting thee."

"You told me once that no other arms than yours or mine should ever enfold her," murmured Tito, with desperation. "Whose is she to be first—yours or mine? Tell me!"

"Thou art jealous of me?"

"Horribly so."

"Thou art wrong," replied Death.

"Whose is she to be first?" repeated the youth, seizing the cold hands of his friend.

"I cannot answer thee. God, thou and I dispute her; but we three are not incompatible."

"Tell me that you do not intend to kill her. Tell me that you will unite us in this world."

"*In this world!*" repeated Death, ironically.

"Yes, it will be in this world, I promise thee."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards belongs to God."

"And yours? When?"

"Mine, she has already been."

"You madden me! Elena lives!"

"As thou dost," replied Death.

"But, do I live?"

"More than ever."

"Speak, for pity's sake!"

"I have nothing to tell thee. Thou wouldst not be able to understand me yet. What is death? Perhaps thou knowest. What is life? Have I ever explained it to thee? If thou art ignorant of these conditions, why dost thou ask if thou art dead or alive?"

"Well, shall I comprehend them some day?" exclaimed Tito, desperately.

"Yes, to-morrow," answered Death.

"To-morrow! I do not understand you."

"To-morrow thou wilt be wedded to Elena."

"Ah!"

"And I will be thy protector," continued Death.

"You! you then intend to kill us?"

"Not at all. To-morrow thou wilt be rich, noble, powerful, happy. To-morrow also thou wilt know all."

"You love me, then!" exclaimed Tito.

"Yes, I love thee," replied Death. "Ungrateful boy, why dost thou doubt it?"

"Then good-bye *until to-morrow*," said Tito, giving his hand to the terrible divinity.

Elena continued standing before her lover.

"*Until to-morrow*," she responded, as if she had heard the phrase—as if answering another secret voice—as if divining the youth's thoughts;—and slowly turning she left the royal chamber.

Tito approached the king's bed.

The Duke of Montecclaro placed himself at his side, and said to him in a low voice:—


"If the king dies, you will celebrate your marriage with my daughter to-morrow; the queen has just informed me of the death of the Viscount of Rionuevo. I have announced your wedding with Elena, and she congratulates you both with all her heart. To-morrow you will be the first person of the Court, if Louis really passes to the tomb to-day."

"But do not doubt it, Sire," responded Tito, with sepulchral accent.

"Then farewell *until to-morrow*," said Montecclaro, solemnly.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH TITO IS AGAIN HAPPY, AND THE FIRST PART OF THIS STORY IS COMPLETED.

HE following day, the first of September, 1724, at nine in the morning, Tito was pacing the halls of the palace of Rionuevo.

That palace belonged to him. He was now the acknowledged Count, by virtue of the will and other papers of his father, which the Duke of Montecarlo and the Archbishop of Toledo had found in the place indicated by the Countess. Besides, the night before, a messenger had delivered to him from Philip V., who had finally decided to return to the throne of St. Ferdinand, \$30,000 in gold, and the title of Duke of Verity, Physician to the Court; and the next day he was to celebrate his marriage with Elena. With regard to Death, Tito had completely lost sight of him since the previous morning,

when he left the palace with the soul of Louis I.

Nevertheless, the youth remembered that the implacable deity had promised to protect him in his marriage; and you will now observe the reason why he walks so thoughtfully.

"Here am I," said he, "noble, rich, powerful, and possessed of the woman I love; still I am not content. Last night, at sight of Elena, and again in my last conversation with Death, I suspected, I know not what terrible mysteries. I must sever relations with this sinister deity. It seems ungrateful, but it must be. He will have occasion in the future to avenge himself. No, no! I do not wish to see Death again, I am so happy."

The new Duke commenced to plan how to avoid Death, until his last moments should arrive.

"It is a fact," thought he, "that I shall not die until God wills it. Death himself can do me no harm. It is not in his power to hasten Elena's death or mine. The question therefore is, how not to see, how not to hear him at

all hours. His voice alarms me; his revelations afflict me; his conversations inspire me with a disregard for life and all I hold most dear. What shall I do to prevent his continuing to be my nightmare? Ah! an idea! He never appears except when he has something to kill. Living in the country—never seeing any one—alone with Elena—my enemy would leave me in peace, until that time, when by the decree of the Almighty, he should be directed to search for one or both of us. In the mean time, and in order not to see him in Madrid either, I will live with my eyes blindfolded."

Encouraged by this last thought, the youth beamed with happiness, as though, having just arisen from a long illness, he believed himself assured of remaining upon earth for all time.

* * * * *

At seven on the following evening, Tito and Elena were married at a beautiful country-house belonging to the new Count and Duke, at the mouth of the Guadarrama River.

At half-past seven the guests returned to

Madrid, and the newly wedded couple were left alone in the midst of a luxuriant garden.

Tito had not again seen Death, and I might terminate this history here ; but just at this point it commences to be interesting and lucid.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SUN IN THE WEST.



ITO and Elena, loving each other, belonging to one another, were at last free and alone.

The remembrances of their infancy, the desires of their hearts, the will of their parents, fortune, birth, the blessing of God, all aided in uniting them; and those two forever inseparable souls, lost at last, in this solemn and mystical hour, their sad and solitary individuality, and merged themselves into an endless, happy future, as two rivers, rising in the same mountain, and separated from each other in their tortuous courses, reunite and identify themselves in the infinite solitude of the ocean.

It was evening. It did not seem like the evening of a single day, but as of that of the world's existence, the evening of all Time since creation. The sun sank slowly in the west, the

splendid lights gilding the front of the villa, and penetrating through the tender green foliage of a spreading vine, a sort of canopy which sheltered the newly wedded pair.

The still, soft air, the last flowers of the year, the birds, immovable in the branches of the trees, all nature in fact assisted, mute and fearful, at the death of that day. It seemed as if it might be the last that humanity would see. As if the Astral King might not return the following day as generous, happy, and as full of life and youth, as he had presented himself for so many mornings during so many thousands of centuries.

One would have said that at that point, Time had stopped ; that the hours, overcome by their continual dance, had seated themselves on the grass to rest, and were telling each other pathetic stories of love and death, like young school girls, who, fatigued with play, draw aside in the garden of a convent to relate to one another their childish adventures and youthful joys.

One would have said that a period in the history of the world was drawing to a close ;

that all creation was bidding an eternal farewell. The bird to his nest, the zephyr to the flowers, the trees to the river, the sun to the mountain; that the intimate union in which all had lived, lending mutual color or fragrance, and losing themselves in the same palpitation of universal existence, had been broken and interrupted forever, and that in the future each one of those elements would be governed by new laws and influences.

One would have said, in fact, that on that evening the mysterious association constituting the unity and harmony of the spheres was about to dissolve; an association which makes impossible the loss of the most insignificant of created things; which transforms and continually resuscitates matter, and which from nothing, identifies, renews and embellishes all.

More than any one or anything, possessed of this supreme intuition, this strange hallucination, Tito and Elena with clasped hands, immovable and silent, watched the majestic tragedy of the death of that day, the last of their misfortunes. They looked at each other with deep anxiety, and blind idolatry,

not knowing of what they thought, forgetful of the entire universe, ecstatic and entranced. They might have believed themselves alone upon the earth, abandoned.

After the departure of the wedding guests, and the sound of the last footsteps had ceased in the distance, it seemed as though the world had entirely left them.

Nothing had been said—nothing!—so absorbed were they in beholding each other.

There they were, seated on a bank of turf, surrounded with flowers and verdure, an infinite sky before their eyes, as free and alone as two sea birds resting in mid ocean on a wreck rocked by the waves; and with the cup of happiness in his hand, Tito dared not press it to his lips, fearful that all might be a dream, and not coveting greater felicity, through fear of losing that which they already possessed.

There they were, as innocent, beautiful and immortal as Adam and Eve in Paradise before the Fall. The maiden of nineteen years was in all the splendor of her wonderful beauty; in that transitory moment of youthful woman-

hood, when, possessed of all her fascinations, judge of her own nature, full of blessings, and promises of happiness from Heaven, she is capable of feeling all, yet has felt nothing; woman and child in one. As a rose, half-opened to the generous influence of the sun, that has already displayed all its leaves, shown all its charms, and received the caresses of the zephyr, still preserves that form, color and perfume that alone adorn the modest bud.

✓ Elena was tall and statuesque, artistic and seductive—her lovely head, crowned with auburn hair, of a golden hue at the temples, and changing by degrees to chestnut shades, was poised upon a white throat moulded like that of Juno. Her blue eyes seemed to reflect the infinity of uncreated thought. There was something of heaven in them besides their color and purity. There was in their glance a light as of eternity, of pure spirituality, of immortal passion, that did not belong to earth. Her complexion, white and pallid as water at twilight, was transparent as mother of pearl. It did not reflect the warmth of the

blood ; some delicate vein of heavenly blue alone broke that still, serene whiteness. One would have said she was of marble. Her angelic countenance had, however, a woman's mouth, vermilion as the blossom of the pomegranate, moist and brilliant as a bed of pearls. It was, if one might so say, submerged in the warm and voluptuous vapor of the sigh which held it half apart.

One might compare Elena to the statue carved by Pygmalion, when for the first time and in order to return the sculptor's kiss, she moved those bewitching lips. Her dress was white, which greatly increased the dazzling brilliancy of her beauty ; but she was one of those women from whom ornaments do not detract.

With her, as with the noble pagan Minervas, one was not left to divine the pure form of her Olympic beauty, which revealed itself in all its splendor, though covered by silk and lace.

It seemed as though the pure beauty of her exquisite form shone through the folds of her white gown, as those of the Naiads and sea-

nymphs illumine, with their polished limbs,
the depths of the waves.

Such was Elena on her wedding night, and
such she appeared to Tito.

She was his own !

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ECLIPSE OF THE MOON.



H! yes: the youth beheld her as the blind behold the sun, who see not the luminary planet, but feel its warmth in their dead pupils.

After so many years of solitude and trouble, after so many hours of mournful dreams, he, the Friend of Death, found himself engulfed in an ocean of life, in a world of light, of hope, of felicity.

What was he to say, what was he to think, if he could not believe that he existed; that that woman was Elena, his wife, that both had escaped the clutches of death?

"Speak, my Elena, tell me all," murmured Tito at last, when the sun had set, and the birds had broken the silence. "Speak, my darling."

Elena then told him of all her thoughts and feelings during those three last years: her

sorrow when she ceased to see him, her despair at going to France, how her father had opposed this love, of which the Countess of Rionuevo had informed him; how happy she was at meeting him again in the porch of San Millán, and how she suffered at seeing him fall, wounded by the Countess' harsh words.

She told him all, because it had increased her love instead of diminishing it.

The night fell and the darkness increased, but the secret anguish which disturbed Tito's happiness was calmed. "Oh!" thought the youth, pressing Elena to his heart. "Death has forgotten my face and knows not where to find me. He will not come here. Ah! no. Our undying love would be able to put him to flight. What could he have to do at our side? Come, come, dark night, and envelop us in thy black veil! Come, even if thou must remain forever. Come, even though to-morrow should never dawn."

"You tremble, Tito," murmured Elena, "you weep."

"My wife," murmured the youth, "my own, my heaven, I weep for joy."

So saying, he took his young wife's bewitching head between his hands and fixed in her eyes an intense, delirious gaze.

A deep and burning sigh, a cry of wild passion met between their lips.

"My love!" they murmured in the delirium of that first kiss, at whose tender sound the invisible spirits of solitude trembled.

At this moment the moon suddenly rose, full, splendid, and magnificent.

Its strange, unexpected light startled the two lovers, who, turning their heads at the same moment towards the east, separated from one another through some mysterious instinct, though still retaining each other's trembling, clinging hands, cold at that moment as the alabaster of the tomb.

"It is the moon," murmured the two in hoarse accents, and turning to gaze at one another ecstatically. Tito extended his arms towards Elena with indefinable tenderness, and with as much love as despair.

But Elena was as pale as a ghost.

Tito trembled.

"Elena, what is it?" he whispered.

“Oh ! Tito,” responded the girl, “you are so white.”

At this moment the moon was eclipsed ; it was as if a cloud had interposed itself between her and the two lovers.


But, ah ! it was not a cloud. It was a long black shadow, that appeared to Tito, from the bank on which he reclined, as if touching the skies and the earth, draping the entire horizon in mourning. It was a colossal figure, but increased by his imagination ; a terrible being enveloped in a long, dark mantle. It stood at his side, immovable and silent, covering them both with its shadow.

Tito knew *who* it was.

Elena did not see the lugubrious personage. She continued gazing at the moon.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHYSICIAN, AT LAST!

ITO was between love and death, or rather between death and life. Yes, because that dismal shadow which had come between him and the moon, clouding the splendor of passion in Elena's countenance, was the divinity of darkness, our hero's faithful companion ever since his first thought of suicide.

"How art thou, friend?" said he.

"Ah! hush!" murmured Tito, covering his face with his hands.

"What is it, my love?" questioned Elena, observing her husband's anguish.

"Elena! Elena! do not leave me!" exclaimed the youth in despair, winding his left arm about her neck.

"I must speak to thee," added Death, taking Tito's right hand and drawing him gently towards him.

"Come, let us enter," said the youth to Elena, retreating from Death toward the villa.

"No! come with me; we must go," said Death, pointing toward the garden gate.

Elena neither saw nor heard him; this sad privilege was reserved for the Duke of Verity alone.

"Tito, I await thee," added the sinister personage.

The unfortunate boy shivered to the marrow of his bones. Copious tears fell from his eyes, which Elena gently brushed away. He disengaged himself from her arms and ran wildly through the garden, exclaiming between heart-rending sobs:—

"To die! to die now!"

Elena wished to follow him, but doubtless, on account of the state into which the condition of her husband had thrown her, at the first step she fell senseless to the ground.

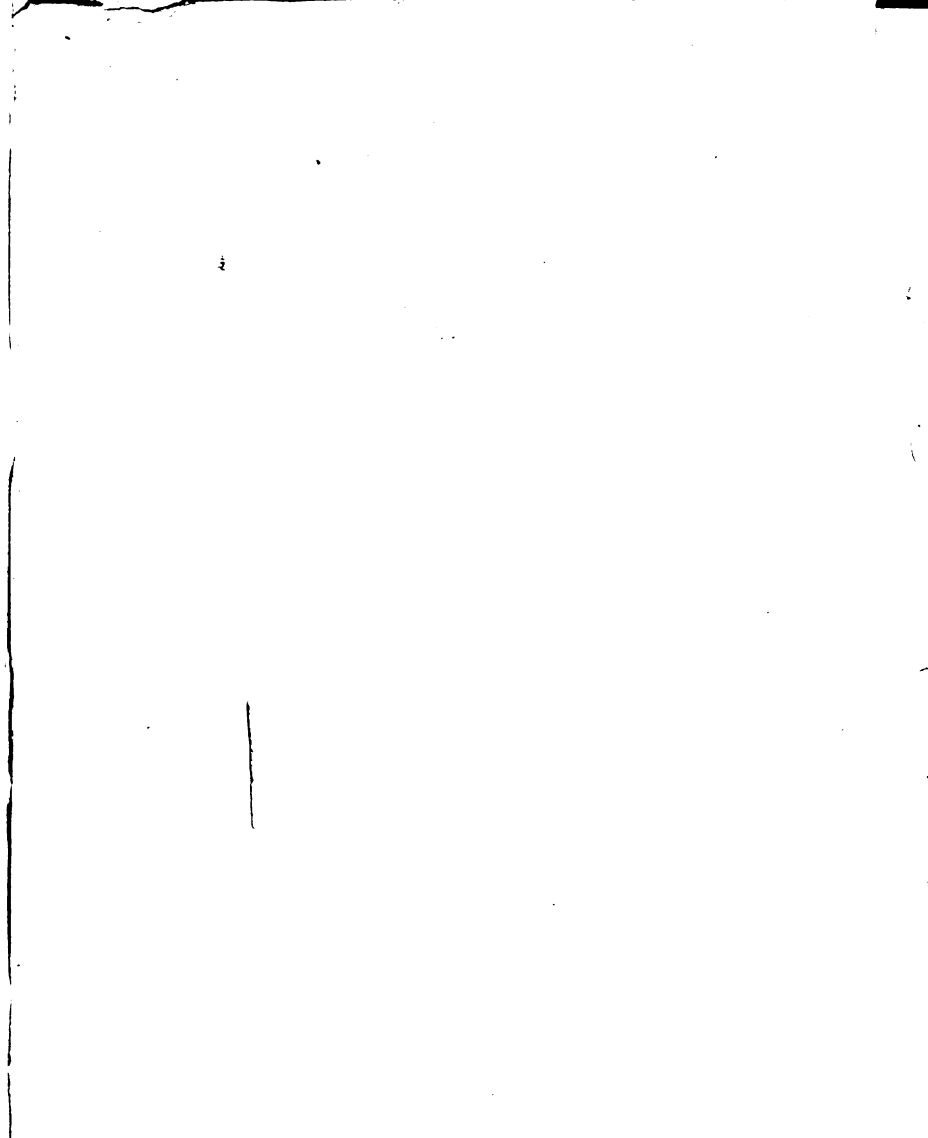
"To die! to die!" exclaimed the youth again with desperation.

"Fear not," replied Death, approaching him gently. "It is useless for thee to fly from me.

It has been decreed that we should meet, and I do not intend to abandon thee as thou wishest."

"But why have you come here?" exclaimed Tito, furiously, wiping away his tears, as if relinquishing supplication and perhaps prudence, and addressing Death defiantly. "Why have you come here? Answer!" and he glanced about angrily as if seeking some weapon. Near to him was a large garden axe. He grasped it convulsively, and raised it in the air, as if it were a weak reed (for despair had doubled his strength), and repeated for the third time and with more fury than ever:—"Why have you come here?"

Death burst into a loud, cynical laugh, the echo of which resounded for a long time. It reverberated in the four corners of the garden, imitating with its strident sound the rattling of a skeleton's bones when knocking against each other. "Thou wishest to kill me!" exclaimed the black spectre. "So, Life opposes itself to Death! This *is* interesting. Let us fight, then." Saying this he threw back his long black cape, exposing an arm which





grasped a weapon resembling a scythe, and put himself on guard, in front of Tito.

The moon assumed a yellow, waxy color; a cold wind blew, which made the fruit-laden trees groan with sorrow; one heard the distant barking of many dogs, or they seemed rather long howls of funereal omen; and one even seemed to hear, high up in the region of the clouds, the jangling sound of many bells that tolled of death.

Tito, noting all these things, fell upon his knees before his antagonist.

"Pity! pardon!" he cried, with indescribable anguish.

"Thou art forgiven," gently responded Death, hiding his weapon; and as if all that funereal pomp of nature might have arisen from the fury of the black divinity, no sooner had a smile appeared on his lips, than the atmosphere calmed, the bells ceased, the dogs stopped howling, and the moon shone as brightly as at the commencement of the night.

"Thou hast pretended to fight with me," exclaimed Death with good humor. "Physician, at last! Arise unhappy one, and give me

thy hand. I have said that thou hast nothing to fear for this night."

"But why do you come here?" repeated the youth with increasing anxiety. "For what have you come? Why do I find you in my house? You enter only where you have someone to kill. Whom do you seek?"

"I will tell thee all. Let us be seated a moment," said Death, caressing Tito's icy hands.

"But, Elena!" whispered the youth.

"Let her rest. She is *sleeping* now. I watch for her; therefore let us arrange our affairs. Tito, thou art an ingrate! but thou art like *all* others; once upon the summit, they kick the ladder by which they rose. Oh! thy conduct towards me deserves no pardon from God. How much thou hast made me suffer in these last days! how much! how much!"

"Ah! but I adore her," cried Tito.

"Thou adorest her, that is it; but thou hadst lost her forever; thou wert a miserable shoemaker, and she was about to marry a person of rank; I intervened, I made thee rich, noble, famous; I freed thee of thy rival; I reconciled

thee with thine enemy and carried her to the other world. Finally I gave thee Elena's hand; and here, at this moment, thou turnest thy back upon me, triest to forget me, and coverest thine eyes so as not to see me. Thou art as stupid as the rest of men. They who should always see me in their thoughts, blind themselves with the vanities of this world, and live without devoting one thought to me, until I come to claim them. My lot is a very unfortunate one. I do not remember of ever approaching one mortal, without having surprised and frightened him as though he had never expected me. Even those of five score years believe that they can do without me. Thou, for thy part, who hast the privilege of actually seeing me, and who art not able to forget me as thou wouldst, placed before thine eyes, the other day, a means of forgetfulness, a bandage of cloth; and to-day thou hidest in a lonely garden, imagining thyself secure from me forever. Fool! Ingrate! False friend! *Man!!* And that tells all!"

"Well," stammered Tito, whose confusion and shame had not quieted his suspicious curi-

osity, "for what reason do you come to my house?"

"I come to complete the mission, which the Eternal One has charged me with, concerning thee."

"But you do not come to kill us?"

"By no means."

"Ah! Then—,"

"But now that I do see thee, or, rather, that thou seest me, I must take precaution to prevent thee from forgetting me again."

"And what are these precautions?" said Tito, trembling more than ever.

"I must also make thee several important revelations."

"Ah! return to-morrow."

"No! impossible; our meeting to-night is providential."

"Oh, my friend!" exclaimed the poor youth.

"And because I am thy friend, thou must follow me," responded Death.

"Where?"

"To my house."

"To your house! Then you *have* come to kill me! Ah, cruel! And this is your friendship! Frightful sarcasm! You give me happiness and then snatch it from me. Why did you not let me die that night?"

"Hush, unfortunate boy!" replied Death, with solemn sadness. "Thou sayest that thou knowest happiness. How thou dost deceive thyself! This I ask thee. How dost thou know it?"

"Elena is my happiness, I renounce all else."

"To-morrow thou wilt see more clearly."

"Kill me, then!" shrieked Tito, with desperation.

"It would be useless."

"Kill *her* then! Kill us both!"

"Thou ravest!"

"To go to your house! my God!"

"Tito, compose thyself."

"Let me at least take leave of her. Let me bid her farewell!"

"I accede to that. Awake, Elena, awake! I command thee to come. Behold! she is there."

“What shall I say to her? At what hour to-night may I return?”

“Tell her that at daylight she will see thee.”

“Oh, no! I do not wish to stay with you so many hours. To-day I have more fear than ever.”

“Be careful!”

“Do not be angry!” exclaimed the unhappy bridegroom. “Do not be angry, but tell me the truth. We will see each other truly at daybreak, Elena and I?”

Death solemnly raised his right hand, and looking up to heaven, his sad voice answered:—

“I swear it!”

“Oh, Tito! what is this?” exclaimed Elena, advancing through the trees, pale, graceful and luminous as a mythological personification of the moon.

Tito, ghastly pale also, his hair dishevelled, his gaze stern, his heart troubled, kissed Elena’s forehead, saying with hoarse accent:—

“Farewell until to-morrow. My life! await me!”

“ His life ! ” repeated Death, with deep compassion.

Elena raised her eyes to heaven, bathed in sad tears, and overcome with a mysterious anguish, she clasped her hands, and repeated in a voice not of this world, “ Until to-morrow.”

Tito and Death disappeared, and she was left standing there among the trees, her hands clasped in front of her body. Immovable, magnificent, in the full light of the moon, she looked like some noble statue without a pedestal, forgotten, in the midst of the garden.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REVERSE OF TIME.



“We have far to go,” said Death to our friend, as soon as they had left the villa. “I will order my chariot.”

He tapped the ground with his foot, and a rumbling noise, like that which precedes an earthquake resounded beneath the ground.

The two friends were soon enveloped in an ash-colored vapor, in the midst of which there appeared a sort of ivory coach, in the style of those we see in the bas-reliefs of pagan times. The most casual observer would have seen at a glance that the chariot was not of ivory, but of human bones, cleansed and joined with exquisite workmanship, but without having lost their original form.

Death gave his hand to Tito, and they entered the carriage, which rose in the air with the lightness of a balloon, the single

difference being that it was guided by the will of the occupants.

"Although we have far to go," continued Death, "we have more than enough time; for this chariot will fly as rapidly as I desire, and as quickly as the imagination; we can go alternately fast and slow, making the circuit of the globe in the three hours at our disposal. It is now nine o'clock at night in Madrid. We will travel toward the northeast, and so avoid meeting the sunlight immediately."

Tito remained silent.

"Magnificent! Thou art determined to maintain silence," continued Death, "then I alone must talk. But all that thou art about to contemplate will distract, and soon make thee break that silence. Onward!"

The chariot, which had oscillated in the air, without direction, from the time our travellers had entered it, then put itself in motion, just grazing the earth with an indescribable velocity.

Tito saw at his feet, mountains, trees, ruins, precipices, plains, all in quick succession.

From time to time some bonfire revealed a

simple shepherd's hut ; but more frequently the carriage passed rather slowly over the tops of great rocky masses, piled up in rectangular forms, between which, great shadows crossed, preceded by a light ; and at the same time they heard the ringing of bells, tolling for death or striking the hour (which is about the same), and the song of the watchman who repeated it. Death then laughed, and the carriage again flew extremely fast. As they advanced toward the east, the darkness was more intense, the quietness of the cities more profound, and the silence of nature greater.

The moon flew toward the west like a frightened dove, while the stars changed their places in the sky, like a dispersing army.

"Where are we?" asked Tito.

"In France," responded Death. "We have already crossed the greater part of the two bellicose nations which fought so furiously at the beginning of this century ; we have seen the whole theatre of the War of Succession. Conquerors and conquered rest at this moment. My apprentice, Sleep, reigns over those heroes

who did not die in battle, nor afterwards of sickness or old age.

“I cannot see why all men are not friends below. The identity of your weaknesses and misfortunes, the need that you have one for another, the shortness of your lives, the spectacle of the infinite greatness of the spheres, and the comparison of these with your own littleness, all ought to unite you fraternally, as voyagers threatened with shipwreck. There—there is no love, hate, ambition; no one is creditor or debtor; no one great or small; no one happy or unhappy. The same danger surrounds you, and *my presence* levels you all. Therefore what is the earth, seen from this altitude, but a boat that is about to sink, a city threatened with a pest or conflagration.”

“What fatuous lights are those I see shining in some parts of the earthly globe, since the moon has gone down?” asked the youth.

“They are cemeteries. We are over Paris. At the side of every living city, town, or hamlet, there is always a dead city or town, as the shadow is always beside the body. Geography, therefore, is always double, al-

though you speak only of that which appears most agreeable. To make a map of all the cemeteries upon earth would suffice to explain the political geography of thy world: nevertheless it would be an equivocation, for the dead cities are much more populous than the living. In the latter, there are hardly three generations, while in the former, one finds at times hundreds, accumulated. With regard to those lights which thou seest shining, they are phosphorescences of corpses, or, more clearly, the last sparks of a thousand vanished existences. They are twilights of love, ambition, anger, genius, charity. They are, in fact, the last flashes of the light of the individuality which disappears—of a being, which returns its substance to Mother-earth. They are, (and now I find the true phrase) the froth which the river forms on meeting the ocean." Death paused.

At that moment Tito heard a fearful clamor beneath his feet, like the rolling of a thousand carriages over a long wooden bridge. He looked toward the earth but did not see it. In its place he saw a species of movable sky which seemed to surround them.

"What is this?" he asked, terrified.

"It is the ocean," said Death. "We have just crossed Germany and are entering the North Sea."

"Ah, no!" said Tito, overcome with instinctive terror. "Take me in another direction. I would like to see the Sun."

"I will take thee to see the Sun, although we must go backward for it. Thus thou wilt see the curious spectacle of time turning backwards."

He turned the chariot in space, and they commenced to run to the southwest.

A moment afterward Tito heard the sound of waves.

"We are in the Mediterranean," said Death. "Now we cross the Strait of Gibraltar. Here is the Atlantic Ocean."

"The Atlantic!" exclaimed Tito, with respect. He saw nothing but sky and water, or, more properly speaking, sky alone.

The chariot appeared to wander about in space, beyond the terrestrial atmosphere.

The stars shone in every direction round about him wherever he fixed his gaze.

So passed another moment.

At the end of it he perceived in the distance a purple line which separated those two heavens, the one floating the other immovable.

This purple line turned to red, and then to orange; afterwards it became brilliant as gold, illuminating the surface of the waters. The stars disappeared by degrees, and one would have said that day was about to dawn. All at once the moon again appeared, but it had hardly shone a moment when the light of the horizon eclipsed it in brilliancy.

"It is the dawn," said Tito.

"On the contrary," responded Death. "It is twilight, only that as we travel behind the sun, and much faster, the west appears to be the aurora, and the aurora the west. Here are the beautiful Azores!"

In truth a lovely group of islands appeared in the midst of the ocean.

The sad, evening light, breaking through the clouds and penetrating the mist of the rivers, gave an enchanting aspect to the archipelago.

Tito and Death passed over that oasis in the marine desert without stopping a moment.

In ten minutes more the sun appeared from the bosom of the waves, and rose a little on the horizon.

But Death stopped the chariot and the sun again sank.

They moved again and the sun rose. There were two twilights in one.

All this astonished Tito greatly.

They drove further and further, engulfing themselves in the day and ocean. Nevertheless Tito's watch indicated quarter past nine at night.

A few moments afterward North America appeared in the seas. Tito saw in passing, the eagerness of men ; how they tilled the fields, bustled in the streets of cities, and skirted the coast in vessels.

In one part he distinguished a great cloud of dust. It was a battle. In another direction, Death indicated to him a grand religious ceremony, dedicated to a tree, the idol of that town. Farther off he showed him two young

savages alone in a wood, gazing with love upon each other.

Very soon the earth again disappeared, and they entered the Pacific Ocean.

Thousands of other islands appeared before their eyes in all directions. In each one of these were different religions and customs. And what a variety of costumes, occupations and ceremonies !

So they reached China where the day was breaking.

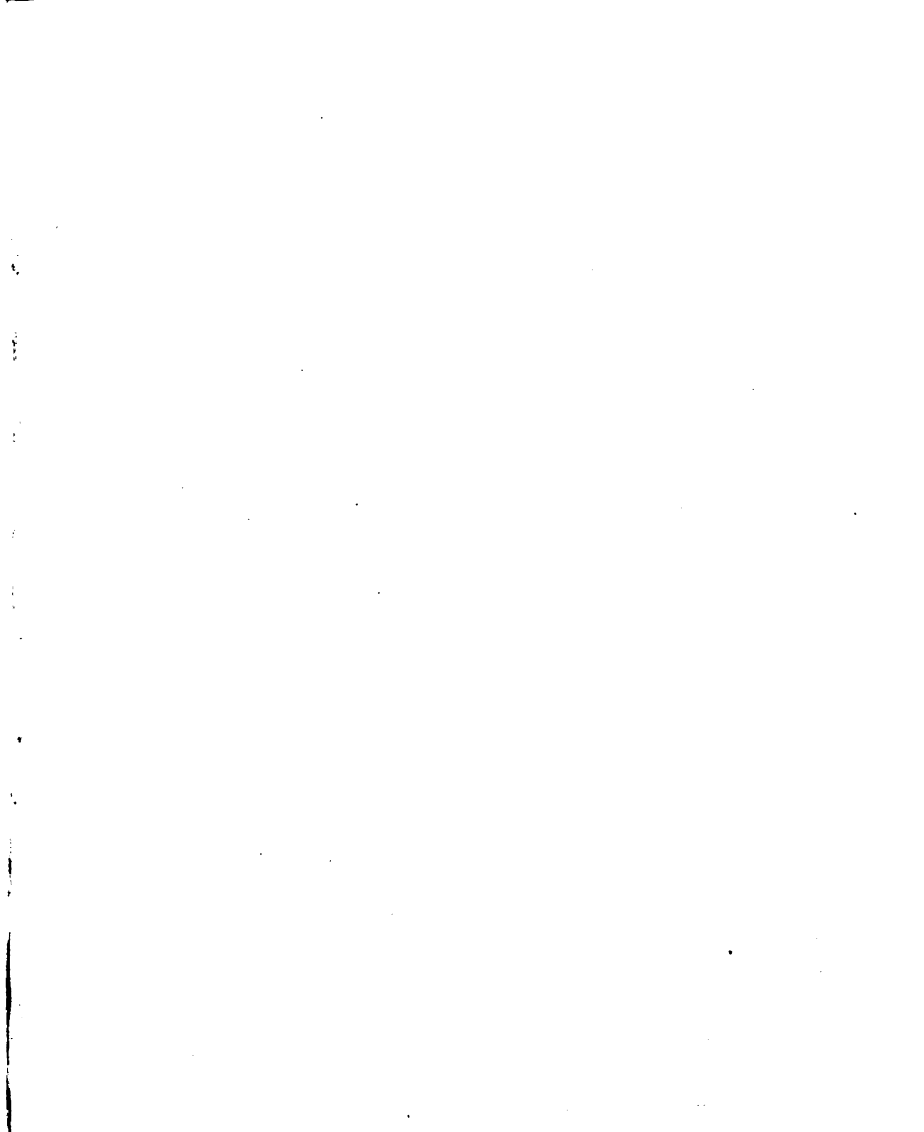
This daylight was twilight for our travellers.

Other stars, different from those which they had seen before, ornamented the celestial dome.

The moon commenced to shine in the east, but soon hid herself.

They continued flying with greater rapidity than the earth turns upon its axis.

They had crossed Asia when it was night ; to the left was the chain of the Himalyas, whose eternal snows glistened beneath the morning stars. They passed the shores of the Caspian Sea, turned a little toward the left, and rose above a hill at the side of a certain





city. At that moment the midnight bell sounded.

“What city is this?” asked Tito.

“We are in Jerusalem,” answered Death.

“Already?”

“Yes, we lack but little of having made the circuit of the world. I stop here because it is midnight, at which hour I never fail to bend the knee.”

“Why?”

“To worship the Creator of the universe;” whereupon the chariot descended.

“I also desire to see the city of God and meditate among its ruins,” responded Tito, kneeling at Death’s side and crossing his hands with fervent piety.

When both had finished their prayers, Death recovered his loquacity and joyfulness; and preceded by Tito again entered the chariot, saying:—

“That hamlet that thou seest yonder on a mountain is Gethsemane. There, was the orchard of olives. On this other side thou wilt distinguish an eminence, crowned by a temple which stands out against a field of

stars: that is Golgotha. There I passed the great day of my life. I thought to have conquered God; and conquer I did, for many hours. But, ah! it was in this mountain, one Sunday morning at daybreak, three days afterwards, that I saw myself disarmed and powerless. Jesus had risen! These sites witnessed also, on that same occasion, my great personal combat with Nature. Here, our duel took place: that terrible duel. It was three in the afternoon, I remember it perfectly, when Nature, who saw me brandish the sword of Longinus against the breast of the Redeemer, commenced to hurl stones at me, to open the cemeteries and resuscitate the dead. What could I think? I believed that she had lost her reason." Death reflected a moment; then, raising his head with a more serious expression of countenance, added:

"It is the hour! Midnight has passed. We will go to my house and finish what we have to say."

"Where do you live?" asked Tito, timidly.

"At the North Pole, amid snows and ice as

old as the world," responded Death, "where never has, nor never will tread human foot."

So saying, Death changed his course to the north, and the chariot flew more rapidly than ever. Asia Minor, the Black Sea, Russia and Spitzbergen, passed like fantastic visions beneath its wheels.

The horizon was soon illuminated with delicate flames, reflected by a landscape of rock crystal. All upon the earth was white and silent.

The rest of the heaven was of a dark purple color, dotted with almost imperceptible stars,—the Aurora Borealis and the ice, all that there was of life in that wonderful region.

"We have arrived," said Death. "This is the Pole."

CHAPTER XVI.

DEATH AGAIN BECOMES SERIOUS.



F Tito had not already seen so much that was wonderful, during his aerial voyage ; if his remembrance of Elena had not so completely absorbed his imagination, and if the desire to know where Death was taking him had not disturbed his saddened spirit, the position in which he found himself, would, at least, have been a very enviable one in which to study, and solve, the greatest of geographical problems—the form and position of the poles of the earth. The mysterious limits of the continents, and of the Polar sea, lost in eternal ice ; the protrusion or depression which, according to different opinions, must mark the position of the true axis upon which our globe turns ; the appearance of the celestial dome, in which one could distinguish all the stars that light the skies of the northern hemisphere ; the

fiery centre of the Aurora Borealis, and in fact so many other phenomena which science has vainly investigated for centuries at the cost of thousands of illustrious navigators who have perished in those perilous regions, would have been as clear and manifest to our hero as the light of day, and we would have been able to explain them to our readers.

But as Tito made no such observations, neither will we be able to consider anything which bears no relation to the story. The human race must remain in its ignorance regarding the pole, and we will continue this narrative.

In reminding our readers that the season was that of the first days of September, they will comprehend that the sun still shone in that heaven, where there had been no night for five months.

By its pale and oblique light our travellers descended from the chariot, and Death, taking Tito by the hand, said to him with gracious courtesy :

“This is thy house. Let us enter.”

A colossal mountain of ice rose before his

eyes, in the middle of which, frozen in snows as old as the world, was a sort of long, narrow opening which scarcely permitted a man to pass.

"I will show thee the way," said Death, passing before.

The Duke of Verity stopped, not daring to follow his companion. But what could he do? Where fly in that infinite desert? What direction take, in those interminable, icy plains?

— "Tito, art thou not coming?" asked Death.

He cast one last and hopeless glance toward the pale sun, and entered the ice.

A winding stairway, carved in the same congealed material, conducted him by tortuous turns to a vast, square room, without furniture or ornaments; all of ice. It reminded one of the great salt mines of Polonia, or the marble rooms of the baths of Ispahan and Medina.

Death had muffled himself up and was sitting down in Oriental fashion in a corner.

"Come hither, sit at my side and we will talk," said he to Tito.

The youth obeyed, mechanically.

So profound a silence reigned that one could have heard the breathing of a microscopical insect, if in that region there might exist anything which did not rely upon the protection of Death.

Words could not express that terrible cold.

Imagine a total absence of heat; a complete annihilation of life; the absolute cessation of all motion; death, as a form of being; and even then you could not conceive an idea of that dead world, or more than dead, as it neither corrupted, transformed nor gave pasture to the worms, manure to the plants, elements to the minerals, nor gases to the atmosphere.

It was chaos.

It was *nothing*, under the appearance of everlasting snows.

Nevertheless, Tito endured it, thanks to the protection of Death.

"Tito," exclaimed he, in quiet and majestic accent, "the hour has arrived in which truth shines before thine eyes in all its magnificent nudity: I will review in a few words the his-

tory of our relations and reveal to thee the mystery of thy destiny."

"Speak!" murmured Tito, resolutely.

"It is undeniable that thou wishest to live; that all my power, all my arguments, and all that I reveal to thee each moment are useless to extinguish the love of life in thy heart."

"The love of Elena, you mean," interrupted the youth.

"Love! love!" replied Death. "Love is life and life is love. Do not mistake that. And if not, think of a thing which thou mayst have comprehended perfectly in thy glorious career as a physician, and during the voyage that we have just made. What is man? Thou hast seen him sleep from sun to sun, and dream, sleeping. In the intervals of this dream he possessed twelve or fourteen hours of wakefulness which he knew not how to employ. On one side, thou foundest him in arms against his fellow-creatures; on the other, thou hast seen him crossing the seas to exchange products. There are those who toil to dress themselves in this or that color; and those who pierce the earth to extract metals

with which to adorn themselves. Here hanging one; there blindly obeying another. On one side, virtue and justice consist in such and such a thing; while on the other, they consist in the reverse. These judge as truth, what those hold to be error. The same beauty will appear to thee conventional and imaginary, according as thou art Caucasian, Mongolian, African or Indian. It will be apparent to thee also, that science is a shallow experiment to obtain the nearest results, or an illogical conjecture of the most recondite causes; and that glory is an empty name, attached by accident (nothing but accident) to the name of this or that corpse.

“ Perhaps thou wilt have comprehended that all which man does is mere child’s-play with which to pass the time; that his greatness and his miseries are relative; that his civilization, social organization and most serious interests, lack common-sense; that fashions, customs, hierarchies, are powder, smoke, vanity of vanities. But what do I say? vanity! less, even! They are playthings with which thou entertainest the leisure of life; the deliriums

of fever; the hallucinations of a maniac. Children, the aged, nobles, plebeians, wise, ignorant, beautiful, deformed, kings, slaves, rich and poor, all are the same to me : handfuls of dust, which dust, my breath unmakes. And still thou clamorest for life ! And still thou tellest me thou desirest to remain in the world ; still thou lovest that perishable creation."

"I love Elena," replied Tito.

"Ah, yes," continued Death ; "life is love, life is desire. But the ideal of this love, and of this desire, should not be a thing of mortal clay. It is the deluded who mistake the near for the remote. Life is love ; life is sentiment ; but the great, the noble, that which reveals life, is the tear of sadness which courses down the cheek of the newly born and of the dying ; the melancholy complaint of the human heart, which feels the desire of life and pain of existence ; and the sweet hope of another life, or the pathetic remembrance of another world. The worry and unhappiness, the doubt and the anxiety of those great souls who are not satisfied with the vanities of the earth, are but pre-sentiments of another world, of a higher

mission than that of science and power; of something, in fact, more infinite than the temporal greatness of men and the transitory graces of women. We will confine ourselves, however, to thee and to thy history, which thou dost not know. We will enter into the mystery of thy anomalous existence, and explain the reasons of our friendship.

“Tito, thou hast said, that of all the supposed felicities which life offers, thou desirest one alone—the possession of one woman. I have therefore gained great victories in thy soul. Neither power nor riches, honor nor glory, nothing, tempts thy imagination. Thou art, then, a consummate philosopher, a perfect Christian, and to this point I have desired to lead thee. Now tell me, if this woman were dead, wouldst thou feel her loss?”

Tito rose, uttering a frightened cry.

“What! Elena?”

“Calm thyself,” continued Death, “thou wilt find Elena as thou leftst her. We speak in hypotheses—so answer me.”

“Before killing Elena, take *my* life! You have my answer.”

"Magnificent!" replied Death, "and tell me: if thou knewest that Elena was in heaven awaiting thee, wouldst thou not die tranquil, content, blessing God, and dedicating thy soul to Him?"

"Oh, yes! death would then be resurrection."

"So, that with Elena at thy side," continued the terrible personage, "thou wouldst ask nothing more?"

"Nothing."

"Well, then, know all. In the Christian world this is not the second of September, 1724, as perhaps thou mayst imagine. Thou and I have been friends many more years."

"Heavens! what do you tell me? In what year am I then?"

✓ "The eighteenth century has passed, the nineteenth, twentieth and even more. To-day is the feast of San Antonio, the year 2316."

— "Then I am dead."

"As thou hast been for nearly six hundred years."

"And Elena?"

"Died when thou didst, and thou didst die the night we met."

"What? I drank the vitriol?"

"To the last drop, and Elena died of grief when she heard of thy unhappy end. She and thou have been in my power for seven centuries."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Tito.

"Listen," replied Death, "and thou wilt know all that I have done in thy favor. Thou and Elena died on the day I said; Elena, destined on the Day of Judgment to ascend to the angels; and thou, meriting all the punishments of Hell. She, for her innocence and purity; thou, for having lived forgetful of God and entertaining vile ambitions. Tomorrow the Day of Judgment commences, when three in the afternoon shall have struck at Rome."

"Oh, my God! It is then the end of the world," exclaimed Tito.

"It is time," replied the formidable being. "Finally I may rest."

"The end of the world!" muttered Tito, with indescribable fear.

"It is of no consequence to thee. Thou hast nothing to lose. So listen. Knowing that the Day of Judgment was approaching, I, who have always cared for thee, as I told thee the first time we met, and Elena, who loves thee as much in heaven as she did on earth, prayed to the Eternal that thy soul might be saved."

"I should do nothing for the suicide," answered the Creator; "but I will confide his spirit to thee for one hour. Improve it if thou canst."

"Save him," said Elena to me.

"I promised, and went down into the sepulchre to find thee, where thou hadst slept six centuries. I sat there at the head of thy coffin making thee dream of life. Our meeting, thy visit to Philip V., thy adventures at the Court of Louis I., thy marriage with Elena, all was a dream in the tomb. *Thou believedst that three days of life passed in one hour, as six centuries of death elapsed in a single instant.*"

"Ah, no! it was not a dream!" exclaimed Tito.

"I understand thy astonishment," replied

Death. "It appeared as existence to thee . . . But such is life, the dreams are realities and the realities dreams. Elena and I have triumphed. Science, experience and philosophy have purified thy heart, have ennobled thy spirit, have made thee see the magnificence of earthly grandeur in all its repugnant vanity; that fleeing from death, as thou didst yesterday, thou fledst only from the world; and that begging for eternal love as thou dost to-day, thou askest for immortality. Thou art redeemed!"

"But Elena," murmured Tito.

"She prays with God. Think not of her; she does not nor ever has really existed. Elena was Beauty! the reflection of immortality. To-day, when the heavenly light of truth and justice resumes its splendor, Elena will be part of Him forever. To Him, then, thou shouldst address thy supplications!"

"It has been a dream!" exclaimed the youth with inexpressible anguish.

"And such will be the world in a few hours; a dream of the Creator."

So saying, Death rose, uncovered his head and raised his eyes to heaven.

"Thou wilt awake in Rome!" he murmured. "The last day begins—Tito, farewell forever."

"Oh! do not abandon me!" cried the unhappy boy.

"Do not abandon me!' thou sayest to Death, and yesterday thou fledst from me."

"Do not leave me here alone in this forsaken region. This is a tomb."

"What!" said the black divinity, ironically, "hast thou fared so badly here, these past six hundred years?"

"What! have I lived here?"

"Lived! call it what thou pleasest. Here thou hast slept all that time."

"Then this is my sepulchre?"

"Yes, my friend, and as soon as I disappear thou wilt be convinced. Then, alone, thou wilt feel the cold of this house."

"Oh! I shall die instantly!" exclaimed Tito; "I am at the North Pole."

"Thou wilt not die, because thou art already dead; but thou wilt sleep until three

in the afternoon, then thou wilt wake with all past generations."

"My friend!" exclaimed Tito, with indescribable bitterness, "do not leave me; or let me continue dreaming. I do not wish to sleep. This dreaming frightens me. This supulchre suffocates me. Return me to the villa on the Guadarrama, where I imagined I saw Elena, and let the destruction of the universe surprise me there. I believe in God. I revere his justice, and I appeal to his mercy, but take me back to Elena!"

"What supreme love!" said the deity. "It has triumphed over life, and it is about to triumph over death. It scorned the earth and it will scorn heaven. It shall be as thou desirest, Tito; but do not forget thy soul."

"Oh! my friend, I thank you! I see that you will carry me to Elena's side."

"No, I will not carry thee to her. Elena sleeps in her supulchre. I will have her come to thee, that she may sleep the last hours of death by thy side."

"We will one day be interred together! Ah! it is too much happiness! I may see

her ; hear her say that she loves me ; know that she will remain forever at my side, on earth or in heaven, and the darkness of the tomb will be as nothing to me."

"Come, then, Elena ! I command it !" said Death, with cavernous accent, tapping on the floor with his foot.

Elena, to all appearances the same as when we left her in the garden of Guadarrama enshrouded in her white robes, but pale as alabaster, appeared in that room of ice, in which this scene had occurred.

Tito received her kneeling, his face wet with tears, his hands clasped. Turning, he cast a look of profound gratitude on the gentle countenance of Death.

"Good-bye, my friend," exclaimed Death.

"Your hand, Elena !" whispered Tito.

"My love !" murmured the maiden, kneeling at her husband's side.

And with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven they sadly answered Death's farewell.

Slowly, the black deity retired.

"Forever !" murmured the Friend of Man in the distance.

“Mine, forever!” exclaimed Elena, clasping Tito’s hands between her own. “God has pardoned thee and we may live together in heaven—”

“Forever,” replied the youth, with ineffable happiness.

Death disappeared.

A terrible cold invaded the apartment.—Tito and Elena, on their knees, their hands clasped, their eyes raised to Heaven, were instantly petrified, immovable in that religious attitude, like two magnificent mortuary statues

CONCLUSION.



FEW hours afterward the earth burst like a shell. The stars nearest it, attracted fragments of the destroyed mass, and assimilated with them, not however without causing tremendous cataclysms, such as deluges, and breakings away from its axis.

The moon, almost intact, became a satellite of either Venus or Mercury. In the mean time the Day of Judgment for the family of Adam and Eve had come to pass, and the souls of the wicked were transported to other planets, there to commence, a new life.

What greater punishment !

Those who purified themselves in this second existence obtained the glory of returning to the bosom of God, when those planets disappeared.

But those who did not so purify themselves passed on to perhaps a hundred other worlds, where they wandered as we, in ours.

That afternoon, the spirits of Tito and Elena entered the Promised Land hand in hand, free, forever, from sorrow and penitence; saved and redeemed; reconciled with God, participants in His beatitude, heirs to his glory. . . .

* * * * *

For the rest, I can end my story as is the custom with old people, saying: "I went, and I came but they told me nothing."

THE END.